

Creating a Student Introduction Portfolio

It's More Than Pictures

What is a portfolio?

Although there are many different types of portfolios, parents of students with disabilities find that “*Student-Introduction*” Portfolios are an effective communication tool. The purpose of this type of portfolio is to assist others in getting to know the student for who he or she is and not just for his or her disability. School personnel often only have access to very traditional special education records – eligibility documentation, IEP goals and objectives, modifications and therapy reports. These types of records do not always give a full and complete picture of the child.

Possible portfolio contents:

- Checklist of who should read the portfolio
- Table of contents (if the pages are numbered and the portfolio is more than 8 pages)
- Student Specific Information

What makes him or her unique?

Their loves, interests and hobbies

A week/day in the life of ...

Family background and information

Educational history

Relevant photographs with captions

Letters or statements from friends, family and peers

Work samples

Artwork

- Pertinent Educational Records



Modifications

Evaluations

IEP goals and objectives

Reports or summaries from therapists

- Pertinent Health/Medical Records
- Articles pertaining to specific medical, health or educational issues
- Helpful hints on using equipment (communication, positioning, mobility)
- Recommended reading list

Getting Started

Sometimes getting started can be the hardest part. Below are helpful hints and some guiding questions to give you a kick start. As always, it far more beneficial (and fun!) to work with others, so get your family and close friends involved.

Why are you creating a portfolio?

This question is actually your first step. It is critical that you take the time to really consider your reasons for putting in all the work that it will take to make a dynamic portfolio. Perhaps your child is transitioning to a new school or program and you want the staff to really know who she is. If this is your purpose, then all information you include in the portfolio should be directly related to this purpose. Consider including a “statement of purpose” as the first page of the portfolio. This will help teachers and other service providers understand what they are reading and why it is so important.

How will your child be involved?

Involve your child from the very beginning, regardless of his or her age. If you plan on your child self-advocating in the future, then now is the time to start. Some children may simply enjoy selecting a piece of their artwork to adorn the cover. Others may want to have more input, such as creating the layout for the

page that describes their interests and hobbies. At the very least, most children enjoy looking at photographs and can identify a favorite or two to include.

How can others be involved?

The team approach to any task makes the job more manageable, enjoyable and thorough. Think about other people to invite to be a part of your “portfolio development team”. This may include your spouse, grandparents, siblings, teacher(s), therapist(s), etc. Each person’s involvement will vary. Your best friend may sit down at the computer with you to offer help and assistance each step of the way. Find someone who is good at proof reading to take a look at the portfolio when you are finished. You may consider asking others to write a paper with the lead statement, “If you knew Jeremy like I know Jeremy . . .” This is especially powerful from siblings, family members and peers who do not focus on educational needs.

Does your family have vision?

Whether you have written it down or not, you have a vision. You may not call it a vision, but you have undoubtedly thought about how you would like to see your child live and interact in this world. Sharing your vision with others will help clearly communicate your expectations, hopes and dreams. We have included one family’s vision in this guide. You may modify it to meet your family’s needs.

What do you hope to communicate? What do you want others to know about your child?

When others read this portfolio, what do you want them to learn about your child? What new insights, thoughts and considerations do you hope will float through their mind as they read? For one family they simply wanted others to see Alex as “a little boy” – not the long list of disabilities. Alex’s mother included photos of Alex sitting on his grandmother’s lap reading a book and playing a board game with his brother. This may not seem significant to most families, but Alex uses a wheelchair and has many pieces of adaptive equipment that follow him wherever he goes. His teachers were so focused on meeting his educational and medical needs that they didn’t always see the six-year old boy. A few photographs and stories reminded everyone that they were teaching ALEX, not a disability.



Who is the audience?

Some parents have referred to the portfolio as a “marketing tool”. Every good marketing campaign identifies the target audience and includes images and information to which the audience can relate. The audience for your child’s portfolio may include teachers, administrators, related service providers, classmates, nurse, cafeteria workers, bus driver, IEP team members, Sunday school teachers and daycare providers. Therefore, if your audience will primarily be middle school teachers, include images and information related to middle school, such as participation in school activities and working with peers. Middle school teachers may not be interested in how your child plays during recess, but they may be interested in how your child functions in unstructured, open activities.

What is the best way to organize the portfolio?

Create a list of the critical pieces of information you want to share in the portfolio. Can the information be grouped into categories such as family, social, education, medical, etc.? It is helpful to keep information grouped together and identified either with divider pages or tabs. Another decision to make is how to physically assemble the portfolio. Some options include using a three-ring binder, binding combs, or a pocket notebook. Whatever you use, make sure the portfolio contents are safely secured.

How will you share the portfolio with others?

Determine how to share the portfolio with the intended audience and make plans to include your child. There are so many options – schedule a staffing or meeting and present the portfolio to the whole team; circulate the portfolio among the teachers and therapists; or meet with key staff during their conference time. No matter which method you choose, remember that teachers and other staff are busy, busy people and will appreciate the information being concise and relevant.



An important last step in creating a portfolio is to evaluate it for effectiveness. Click here for

[A Portfolio Evaluation Tool.](#)

[Sample Portfolio Pages](#)

Portfolios for Work

Rural Institute of Montana – [Representational Portfolios](#) for work

[Video Storytelling Projects made with Microsoft Photo Story](#)