ePortfolios for Reflection
7 Best Practices

Overview
The use of ePortfolios for reflection in the learning process has recently been identified by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as one of eleven high impact practices in response to evidence of its connection to elevated performance, increased satisfaction, and greater levels of student persistence (Watson, Kuh, Rhodes, Penny Light, & Chen, 2016). This guide provides a synthesis of current best practices relevant to the use of ePortfolios for reflection in higher education that are all informed by the references cited.

1. Follow a “Collect, Select, Reflect” process
   a. **Collect**: Gather artifacts that could be used to demonstrate learning (assignments, photos, articles, links to relevant websites, ideas, etc.)
   b. **Select**: Ask students to select specific artifacts for intended purposes (representations of best work, demonstration of progression, etc.)
   c. **Reflect**: Ask students to consider what they selected, why they chose to select it, and how/why it is important to their learning

2. Use the Integrative Learning model
   a. **Integrative Learning** = learning over time + learning across context + intention
   b. Provide an on-going learning community where students can share ideas over time (beyond the time frame of one course)
   c. Provide students with a timeline and checkpoints to keep them on track throughout their academic experience

3. Make the learning relevant
   a. Encourage students to intentionally build relational links between prior understanding of material, and the material that is currently being learned
   b. Invite students to make connections between personal goals and the goals of the portfolio assignment
   c. Ask students to find relationships between: assignments, assignments and lived experiences, courses in programs of study, among disciplines, and among assignments and experiences as they relate to learning outcomes/goals
   d. Ask students to make connections/identify relationships between the learning experiences and their real-world lives

4. Define reflection as a form of learning
   a. Invite students to bring in ideas from multiple sources and to get their hands dirty by putting ideas together
   b. Ask students to reflect on what matters (and provide clear goals for doing so)
   c. Remember that learning is social – make it a conversation
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d. Make risk okay – encourage and value risk taking in the context of an assignment (design choices, artifact selection, strategies for defining connections, etc.)

5. Scaffold strong ePortfolio skills
   a. Include experiences that facilitate and lead up to an ePortfolio assignment
   b. Provide clear guidance that helps to focus students on important issues
   c. Create opportunities for students to practice or hone reflective skills

6. Support effective digital communication
   a. Encourage students to consider their “audience”
   b. Provide students with “design hints” or templates to encourage best practices
   c. Provide learning opportunities that support skills for creating an effective “digital identity”
   d. Ask students to intentionally manage their internet presence by ensuring that it matches who they are, and who they hope to portray themselves as

7. Design successful reflective experiences
   a. Create assignment prompts with the end result in mind – what do you want students to gain from the reflection?
   b. Inform students about the benefits of ePortfolios - why it is and will be helpful or relevant to them
   c. Balance reflective activities with other kinds of assignments
   d. Consider various forms of reflection
   e. Vary the timing of reflective activities (before, during, and after)
   f. Provide timely, validating, practical, and encouraging feedback
   g. Align learning experiences with desired learning outcomes within specific contexts (for relevant portfolio audiences)
   h. Keep it simple (don’t radically change everything in your course)

References: