



## Portfolio planner

Remember that a portfolio is used to show a person's best work. Keeping that in mind, also remember that an educational portfolio should show "movement," in the educational sense. You want to be able to show the evaluator of the portfolio where your child was at point A, and through the hard work she put in this school year, was able to move to point Z. Think beginning, middle, and end here. This is harder than you might think. A portfolio is a "concrete grade book." This means that instead of seeing the child's grades you can see the actual work that received the grade. It is part of what is now known in education as *authentic assessment*. If you want to tell what kinds of work a child is capable of, then look at the work she did, rather than testing her on the work she did and guessing from the results of the testing.

It's what moms and dads have known intuitively all along. Portfolios are a great option for students who don't "test well." For many of us, this is why we chose to homeschool in the first place. If you allow the student to choose, or have a say in choosing his own best work, then he will be more "invested" and "own" his own work. Most of us like this about homeschooling, because at some point the student takes charge of his own education.

A baseline is a record of where the child started at the beginning of the year. You'll want to establish a baseline with one or more samples of the child's work in each subject area you'll be teaching in your homeschool. This can be as little or as much as you like. One page of writing, one page of math problems, and so on may be enough for a base line. Or you can include lots of examples of your student's work from point A. The amount of space you have for storage may be your main consideration here.

You may have used the student goals to set sights on where you wanted your child to be at the end of the school year. You may have had your child have input into these goals. You don't have to know exactly where the student will reach academically by the end of your school year, but a roughed out goal is a good place to start. You may not end up close to your intended goal, but at least you have a plan that you deviated from. As you work through your curriculum, you can either choose work that is particularly well done by your child, or you can save everything. The amount of space you have for storage may of consideration here, as well. Keep in mind, however, that the evaluation process you and the student go through when selecting the best work can be as valuable as creating the work itself.

Portfolios can include everything that is a recordable work. Examples include the following:

- Pictures of field trips.
- Outings to the library, the check out slip of books, a picture of reading the book.
- Pictures of completed projects that were saved for the portfolio and then recycled. This is a great space saver too.
- Videos of plays performed, readings of written works, field trips (or vacations).
- Audio recordings. An example might be having the child tape while reading aloud and presenting a second tape at the end of the school year to show movement.
- Art work. This includes the art work done with an in-depth study or as an extended reading.



- Music and songs written and or sung either for music credit, or as part of a larger project in another academic subject.
- An exercise log, a record of the type and duration of the student's workout.
- A practice schedule, for athletic events and classes.
- A program of an event your child was part of, such as at church or in the community.
- Journal writings your child wants to include.
- Newspaper pictures and/or articles of events your child was part of.
- Screen shots of websites and copies of e-mail your student has participated in.
- An activity log—what the student did when. This could be similar to a journal, but more academic in focus.
- Course descriptions of classes and curriculum your student has completed.
- Listings of educational TV shows your child has watched. PBS has a list on their web site, [www.pbs.com](http://www.pbs.com).
- Pictures of costumes, or the actual costumes, your child used or made for a piece or work.
- Neural network cognitive maps\* of subjects and subject areas learned are an interesting way to display content covered.
- A copy of a brainstorming session on a topic for further study

Other forms and papers from your organizer can be included too.

How elaborate you get with the portfolio is up to you. Some people publish them using a copy center and having the portfolio bound. Some people use plastic cover sheets. Some people use the large, expensive portfolio folders that professionals use. We make books and use staples in the center. We've never had a complaint. A showy one might make you (or the student) feel more at ease when applying to colleges. More and more of them are accepting portfolios in lieu of tests. And more and more colleges are recognizing the superior quality of a homeschooling. A thoughtful, carefully put together portfolio can help back up that recognition.

Remember that you can let the student be the final arbitrator of what goes in the portfolio. You can ask the child why he or she feels a selected piece is representative how work the was done or of the topic learned. If the student wants to save and include everything, consider taking pictures of several of the projects and just include the pictures. It's a big space saver, and children often find it satisfying and will let go of some works as long as they have pictures to remember them by.

Writing an index of what was included and why can be helpful to your evaluator. This can be handy for you as well. In a few years when you look back, it will be nice to know why the tree that looked like a dog was included in the prized work for the year. Just jot a few lines about why this or that was chosen. Or better yet, make this a writing assignment and have the student do it. Public schools rarely provide students the opportunity to evaluate their own work, especially for older students. Homeschooled students can have extensive experience with this important life skill in a nonthreatening, interactive way. People of all ages and backgrounds are usually more critical of their own work than others. Feedback

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\*A mind map is a web-shaped outline (some call them *webs* or *mind maps*) with the topic (or subject) of the map in the middle of the page and subareas branching off the main area, and further branching off of these subareas. See Example on the next pages.

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from an adult mentor or instructor about a work's strengths can be motivating and will strengthen a child's confidence.

This is NOT the time to include work that the student views as incomplete or second rate to show that a student has not made progress. The portfolio should be a positive experience for both you and your child. The best she can do at certain points should be included. Incomplete or inadequate efforts will take care of themselves. Also, at the point of selection you are past the point of offering significant criticism. This is not the time for reflecting about what might be changed. The student and the instructor can do this in the journal section of the Organizer if it needs to be done. It can be rewarding to have the student do his own reflecting on his work. This can be another opportunity for encouraging independence in the learner. On the other hand, having an instructor help a student decide on one or two ways a work can be improved can help the student set goals for revisions and work on specific skills.

A sample index might look like this:

James's journey through fourth grade.

1. Handwriting sample. A story about a tree that looks like a dog. Included because it shows James's handwriting ability and his storytelling skills.
2. A bibliography of videos and books that were read on the civil war. Included because James felt it gave a good overview of the material he covered. The bibliography includes a short summary written by James of each video or book.
3. A page of math problems that reflect Jame's abilities at the start of the school year. Included to give a base line to measure academic movement in math.
4. A song James wrote about sea shells. Included as a music example and a science project.

And so on until you have covered all the academic areas you've decided to cover this school year

On each page write a short description of the portfolio entry itself. Attach it securely—Post-It Notes will fall off over time. Remember the tree that looks like a dog?

For items that don't fit in the portfolio itself, you can add a description and refer to the item elsewhere for the person doing the assessment, for example, *see attached letter E, in box with portfolio*.

You can get much more elaborate with a portfolio, but there is usually no need to do so. It will be a project in itself, and you can put the child in charge of setting up and writing the portfolio. It is a good skill to learn. And you can include the making of the portfolio right in your curriculum.

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**Student Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age/Grade** \_\_\_\_\_

#	Date	Item	Located	Chosen Because	Instructor Comments