Developing PORTFOLIOS

**a professional guide to
principles and practice**

***The* Career-Learning NETWORK**

**The Old Bakehouse
Elsworth, Cambridge CB3 8HX**

This material and its uses

Career management needs information - on the working world, on the self and on how the self relates to the working world. In all three focuses things change, and so learners must learn how to gather and use information over time. Portfolios are designed to enable learners in this task.

The formats used are variously called "records of experience", "records of achievement", "action plans", "progress files", "profiles" and the term used here - "portfolios" .

The following pages contain examples of formats in which a learner can set down information - particularly portraying self and how she or he relates to working-world tasks.

Portfolio formats

The examples are chosen to represent six basic formats:

1. **checklist** - where pre-set items are used to review a situation;
2. **grid** - where the pre-set "assessment"' items are linked to two dimensions - in this case achievement and progress;
3. **time-line** - commonly presented just as a line - (say) from "then" until "now" - but here set out graphically;
4. **scatter-gram** - a looser form of checklist, where the learner is encouraged to be exploratory;
5. **map** - a wholly graphic form, showing how things and people stand in relation to each other (maps can be relational, like the one shown here, but they can also be cartographic, showing where things happen in geographic locations);
6. **discursive writing** - where people write down what they do, see, know, feel and want - in the example given here using a semi-structured format.

In some of the formats it is possible for other people to make the assessment. In all cases the learner can carry out her or his own self portrayal.

Some of the formats can be used in groups, and - in some - learners can helpfully be encouraged to involve others in interpreting what the portrayal might suggests.

However, the most significant feature of designs is in the way in which they can accommodate the telling of a story. Some of the formats rely almost wholly on lists of features or qualities. Others allow for the unfolding of a story in which change over time and exchange with other people features. The case for story formats in careers work is set out elsewhere on this site.

Portfolio coverage

The information on a portfolio can cover:

1. **ability** - what a person can do;
2. **experience** - what a person has done;
3. **disposition** - what she or he is like;
4. **motivation** - what he or she needs or wants.

There is here a range - from showing what a person can offer to work, to showing what he or she seeks from work.

Uses for portfolios

Information like all of this can be used for developing a basis for:

1. **learner action** on career management - in this sense the information is for "first party" use, and is sometimes called "formative";
2. **action by helpers** (counsellors advisers and teachers) to improve how their programme is doing - this is "second party" use and, is sometimes called "evaluative" ;
3. **action for selection or recruitment**, on the basis of how well the learner is doing - this is for "third party", and is sometimes called "summative" .

There are tensions between these three types of use: it is doubtful that all can be reconciled to all. For example, people may not be prepared to set down information for formative use, if they know it might be used for summative purposes: on the one agenda they might be prepared to disclose, on the other they feel they must look good.

Design possibilities

The space available here means that the formats have to be set out in compacted forms. In any event you should redesign format, coverage and presentation to suit your people - and what they are currently learning and doing.

Different combinations of format combine into different overall designs with distinctive "look-and-feel" appeal and relevance.

Any designs can use various combinations of writing and graphics.

The items on the formats shown here are illustrative only. The formats can be used with other items - reflecting various ranges of coverage.

Where formats like this are used over time they can assemble into a continuing story.

Getting more help

A fuller account of this rationale for portfolio and profiling can be found in:

Bill Law (1996). "Recording achievement and action planning", in A G Watts, Bill Law, John Killeen, Jennifer M Kidd and Ruth Hawthorn: *Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance - Theory, Policy and Practice*. London: Routledge. pp. 247-268.

1. Checklist

This format collates a learner's performance in a series of boxes, linking each ability to a specific activity.

Short descriptions of the different activities (e.g. young-enterprise, course module or project) are entered at the top.

The abilities (on the left) are, on this version, described by pre-set criteria . They may be taken from programme attainment targets. These entries can be changed to reflect your programme content.

The resulting chart enables observation of whether, and in what activities, learners meet the criteria. The contributor puts notes or check marks in the boxes where she or he has observed that a particular ability has been exhibited in a particular activity.

The format can be used more than once - showing when each ability has been observed by (one or more) people. The observer can be teacher, learner, colleague, and others.

Different observers can each have their own version of this for independent use.

The format can be adapted for formative, summative and evaluative purposes.

Cells show in what projects, modules or work-experience placements you demonstrated any of these abilities:

Learning for a Changing World	Learning module on changing work in the neighbour-hood	Community enquiry on between-generation job changes	Project on the location and use of the Science Park
contribute to activity as a member of a team			
know and understand how changing work affects the environment			
know and understand how changing work affects people's health and well-being			
know and understand how changing work affects this neighbourhood and its communities			
identify causes of recent changes in work in this neighbourhood.			
be able to negotiate with others in contentious situations			

2. Grid

This version of the grid is based on an analysis of career-learning outcomes - arranged from top-to-bottom on the grid. Other statements of objectives or learning targets can be used.

The learning is arranged hierarchically, with the more basic abilities on the left and the more developed on the right. This gives the report its distinctive appearance (called a "grid" - although not the only format to use a grid).

Reports are made which attend to what the learner is observed to do.

The observer notes when learners reach each level, by shading in the panels under that particular part of the grid. The expectation is that the shading will first appear on the left and - as the learner develops - progressively moves to the right.

Different observers can make their own independently produced grids.

Grids are often accompanied by opportunities for discursive writing in which observers say what the learner actually did to justify her or his entry on the grid. A single observer can use it on a number of occasions for each learner; showing when the learner exhibited each level of ability - and also showing progress over time - from left to right.

Such reports can be used summatively. But they are also formative - both by providing feedback to the learner and by setting targets for future achievement. In particular it can help learners to learn how to learn from their experience, to turn that learning into a basis for forward planning, and to develop a lifelong careers-work portfolio. They can also be used to provide evaluation feedback to the programme of help, by monitoring the speed and extent to which learners are using the programme to reach its targets.

Mark the appropriate panel each time you see a clear occasion on which this particular ability has been demonstrated.

Where am I?	describes work opportunities clearly and accurately	sees similarities and differences between different work	sets out independently to find knowledge of opportunities	uses information about opportunities to make decisions
Who am I?	says what he or she has done and not done well	knows what effect she or he has on others	says what he or she wants in planning new activity	uses information about self to make decisions
What will I do?	knows what he or she wants to do without being told	foresees likely consequences of own action	estimates the degree of risk in a choice	accepts responsibility for own action
How will I cope?	manages day-to-day problems for him or her self	proposes more than one practical solution to a problem	deals with unexpected situations as they arise	manages pressure from other people

Record specific things the learner has done, demonstrating her or his ability in one or more cells in the grid.

At the end of each term or semester collate into a single account for each learner, showing the levels most usually reached, and describing selected actions to demonstrate this.

3. Timeline

This is a recording format for mainly formative purposes - it fits well to a learner's collection of material, gathered over time. It develops the common technique of a timeline, by inviting learners to draw a strip-cartoon of an event or series of events in their lives. In both timelines and strip-cartoons change-over-time is the focus. They provoke comparisons between "beginnings", "middles" and "ends" of episodes.

This format - used here to report a work-experience placement - can take account of the way there are different points-of-view on a single situation. This is essential to an understanding of work. It is also a feature of many of the recording techniques set out later in this collection of formats.

The technique is also useful because it permits ready portrayal of (1) location, (2) activity, (3) other people (what they are doing and saying) and (4) self (what I am doing, saying, thinking and feeling).

The format's ability to portray feeling-laden relationships is plainly important.

It can also begin to suggest links between causes and effects.

The format is particularly useful for exploratory thinking, and more useful still when used with other people who can understand and talk with the learner about what is going on.

The recorded event can be of any span; although more sophisticated use of the technique will probably concentrate on short but significant events.

Write a strip cartoon of a special experience you've had in your work; show where and when it happened, what you did at the beginning, middle and end of the experience. It could be a one-week or one-hour story; you decide!

Put in people you worked with.

Use speech bubbles to show what was said - especially what was said about you and your work. Use thought bubbles to show what was going on in your head - especially what you thought and felt about people around you.
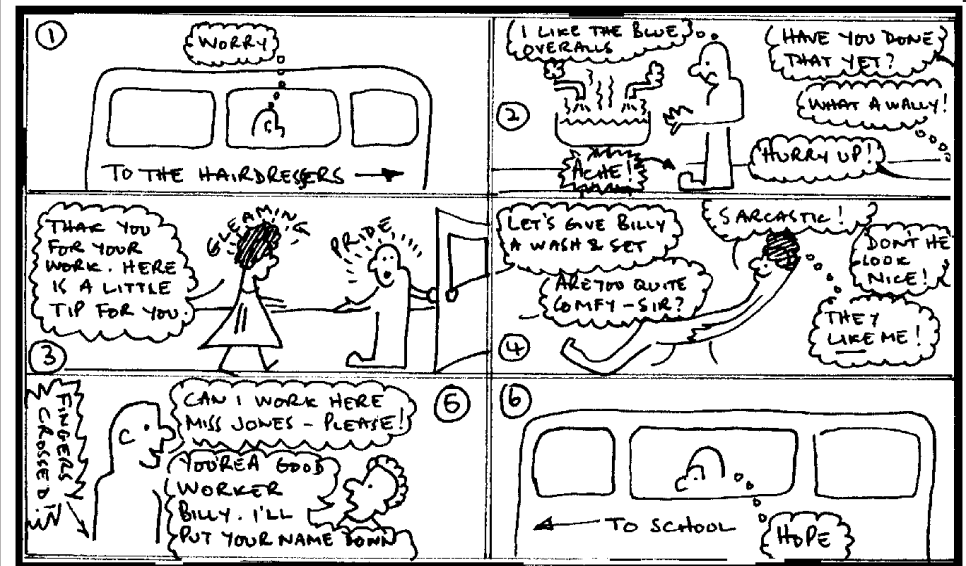
What are the main things you've gained from this experience?
-
-
-

It would be good to show this to somebody who knows you well and cares about you. You could talk over with that person what you have done, what you have learned from it, and what you mean to do about it.

4. Scatter-gram

This format invites learners to make portrayals of what they are like (rather than what they have done or what they want). It records a specific set of working relationships on a specific occasion. The items scattered on the page provide the learner with a vocabulary from which to develop a way of talking about self. It is therefore important that they are carefully chosen.

This format uses 27 items. The alphabetically arranged descriptions are in nine categories. They indicate people who are: (1) active, (2) careful, (3) cooperative, (4) dominant, (5) resilient, (6) self-sufficient, (7) sensitive, (8) sociable, and (9) reliable (there are three descriptors to each category). It avoids the use of such vague and abstract terms as "shows leadership" or "is enterprising" which are difficult to verify. The categories are, nonetheless, comprehensive: important things can be said about everybody by referring to one or more of them. It is unlikely that any individual will be able validly to lay claim to all of these traits on all occasions! Some traits tend to exclude others.

And so the focus is on comparing how some descriptors occur more than others. As a collection of scatter-grams is made, the comparison can move to how a person relates in some situations compared with others.

As confidence and familiarity build, learners may be ready to share perceptions. A first step is to ask members of a small group to recognise each other from the anonymous use of these scatter-grams. They move on to have them completed on each other's behalf ("but you haven't said I listen to others Sue, and I do!" "Maybe you do Charlie, but you didn't listen to *me* !"). With more confidence they are used to gather feedback from work-experience and other community-based contacts. Such uses shift the focus to how I see myself compared with how others see me.

Use these sheets to make your own self-assessments and to get feedback from others on how you go about various tasks.

What is the task and who was involved with you in it?

What did you do?

Use the descriptions to spot evidence that you were the person who, in this situation...

is calm   is careful

decides for self   does what is required   is energetic

is fair to others   fits in with others

is friendly to others   gets things moving   is hard working

has own way   keeps word

listens to others   makes own plans   mixes with others

is open to other's suggestion   is orderly

overcomes difficulties   pays attention to other's feelings   is sociable

shows consideration for others   seeks partners to work with

stands up to others   is tireless   is thorough

is unruffled   works alone

Underline the phrases which apply to you in this situation, and add others here:

It's a good idea to talk this over with a partner in the task before you finalise it. You can change it until you have an account that you both agree.

Signed by you   date

Signed by a partner   date

It would be good to show this to somebody who knows you well and cares about you. You could talk over with that person what you have done, what you have learned from it, and what you mean to do about it.

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5. Map

This is mainly for formative purposes. It focuses on the importance of other people in decision making. Like earlier examples, it fits well to a collection of portrayals.

Learners can use it first to portray a dilemma in tv drama, literature (see below), history or current affairs. The method can, therefore, first serve mainstream subject interests - before that learning is related to career-management interests!

In any event learners may need to see a worked example, with discussion, on the blackboard. They will then, at least, be able to practise its use on other third parties.
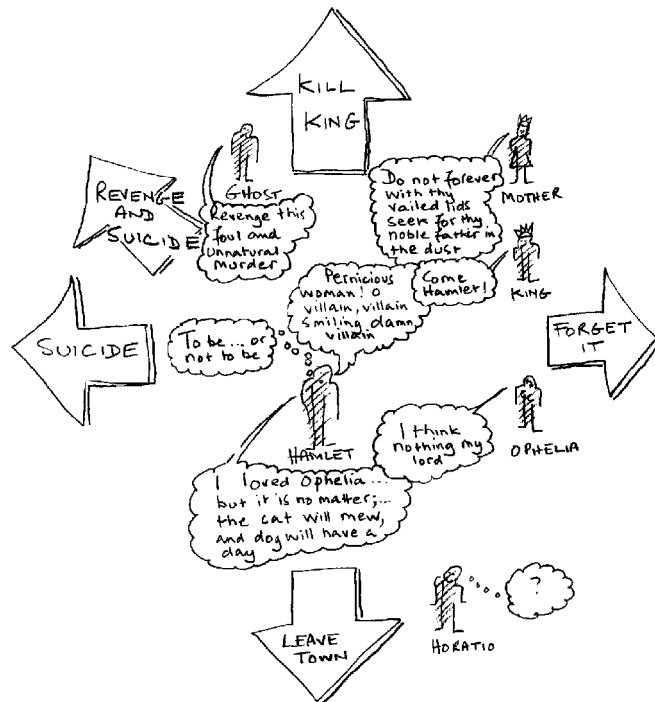
Make a map of all the people who influence you in a particular decision you face. At the centre draw a figure to represent you. Around the edge put notice-boards pointing to the different decisions you could make.
  Near to the decision they each favour, draw figures to represent people or groups who might influence you - or try.
  In speech bubbles put in what they are saying to you.
  In thought bubbles put what they seem to want from you.
  Do speech and thought bubbles for you own thoughts and feelings - in response to each..
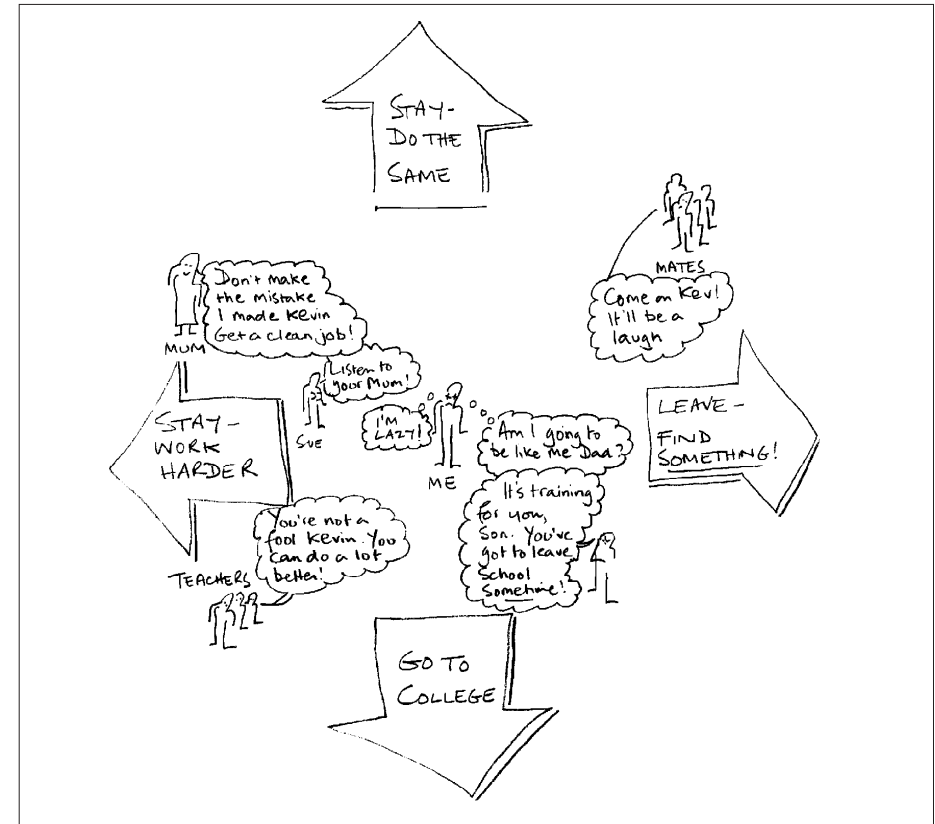
Before you finally decide what to do about this, talk to somebody who knows you and cares about you: you could show them this map as a basis for your talk.

6. *Discursive Writing*

These formats help learners to first (below) set down key aspects of their experience and learning. Later, they (on the right) use these as a basis for deciding on targets for their own action. The stage-by-stage feature of the target-setting format is important, encouraging learners to set themselves manageable targets within scannable periods of time. First of all, a helper has face-to-face time with a learner.

how you have been getting on with your work,
what you want to do about it, and
how we can help you.

Go through your record and note here what you want to be sure you talk about when you meet.

The main things I've done since we last met are:

The things I feel best about are (say why you feel good):

The things I feel least good about are (say why):

This is what I would like to be able to do about this review:

This is what I would like somebody else to do to help (say who):

If you wish you can show this personal review to your tutor. You will be asked to make a joint review with your tutor at the meeting.

Use this to work out a plan of next steps in your thinking and action about work.
This is what gave me the idea for this plan:

This is what I mean to do and why:

First step   by (date)
-
-
-

Second step   by (date)
-
-

Third step   by (date)
-
-

Other steps   by (date)
-
-
-

This is who will help me and how:

This is how I will know if the plan has succeeded:

Signed by you   date

Signed by a your helper   date