

Assessing Student Learning

We have found that the portfolio assessment process is the most effective and thorough way to assess students working on a group video project. Unlike standardized multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank tests, portfolios: 1) give individual students an opportunity to show off their own contribution to the project; 2) show student growth over time from first to final draft; 3) allow students to demonstrate the complexity of self-expression through images, music, written and spoken words and give insight into their thinking and problem solving within the real-life context of a video production; and 4) above all, they teach the values of collaborative critique, revision and reflection. Only when students have internalized these values can they take true ownership over their learning.

The portfolio process works like this: throughout the course of their project, students collect a variety of records that they have created as a natural part of their production process. These records may include journal entries, taped interviews, edit plans, rough-cut edits, research notes, interview questions, tape logs, and phone logs. Early in the semester, students will be introduced to the skills they will need to master, the standards they will be held to and the rubrics they can use during the course of their project to assess their own learning progress. Upon completion of the documentary, students publicly present their work at "portfolio roundtables," comprised of you as well as members of the community, including parents, students, teachers, interviewees, researchers, producers, artists and/or other community members. The roundtable is a time for student reflection and also a time to reach a collective assessment about the thinking and performance of the student, and by extension, the teaching as well.

During the roundtables, students present several drafts of their work to demonstrate how they learned and applied various skills, such as: camerawork, interviewing, editing, research and critical media analysis. They will participate in assessing their progress by referring to rubrics that provide criteria for skill development. Students should already have a clear idea of what counts as high quality work, as they have seen models of such quality work throughout the course. Over time, students begin to internalize those models and criteria and hold themselves to these high standards.

There are many ways in which students might present their work at the portfolio roundtable. Students who choose to highlight camera work might evaluate their learning through the choices of different types of shots to convey a mood; students who present about interviewing might show clips and discuss how they learned to ask pertinent follow-up questions to get desired information; and students who present about the research they conducted might show notes where they summarized and highlighted main ideas or points of information from the articles they read and then, where in the video they incorporated that research.