

PLAR Portfolio Assembly Guidelines

Developing an Educational Portfolio for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

The following guidelines are provided to assist you in the assembly of an educational portfolio for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition at St. Lawrence College. Please read the guidelines carefully and include each component as described.

GOLDEN RULE OF PLAR:

It is the learning from the experience that is recognized and credited, not the experience itself.

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What is a PLAR educational portfolio that is used to challenge a course for credit?

An educational portfolio is an organized collection of materials developed by the individual, which describes your relevant experience, identifies and analyzes your learning achievements based on your past experiences, and provides evidence of this learning. All evidence in the portfolio is described in relation to the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) in the course you are wanting to PLAR for credit.

The Portfolio must adequately:

- Identify/describe your relevant learning accomplishments (knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities).
- Show a match between learning achievements and the outcomes of the course.
- Verify (prove) these learning accomplishments with supportive documents.

What are the Essential Components of an Educational Portfolio?

1. Title Page
2. Introductory Letter
3. Résumé
4. Completed Self-Assessment
5. Table of Contents (Index to your Documentation)
6. Narrative – summary of your learning related to the Course Learning Outcomes
7. Documents to Support your learning

1. Title Page

The portfolio title page should include the following components:

- a. The name of the course for which you are submitting your portfolio
- b. Your name and address, phone number, and email address
- c. Your student number, if applicable
- d. The date of submission of the portfolio
- e. A (signed and dated) declaration of accuracy and verification

“I declare that all of the information in this portfolio is accurate and true. I hereby present this portfolio of evidence of learning, and commit that all documents have been developed by me (in whole or in part, as indicated) during my prior learning.”

2. Introductory Letter

Provides an introduction to you, your goals and an explanation of why you believe you already have the learning required for the course (name the course and course code).

- No more than 2 pages
- Written in a narrative form

If there is information related to the portfolio that you wish to highlight, mention this in the introductory letter. For example, if there is a question of privacy or confidentiality for some of your evidence, you may wish to mention that and detail what has been done to address this.

3. **Résumé**

Your résumé is a general summary of your education and employment background, written to emphasize your strengths and abilities, and highlighting your accomplishments that reflect learning listing in the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs).

The following areas of information should be included as they relate to your learning being used to prove the CROs:

- education
- work experience
- activities and interests
- Possible references (if required)

4. **Completed Self-Assessment**

Provides an indication of where you think you have the required knowledge, skills and abilities, matched against the CLOs. This may provide a basis for an assessor to ask for additional evidence, or to explore your learning through interview questions.

5. **Table of Contents (Index to your Documentation) & Learning Summary**

This section is a key element in the portfolio. It demonstrates your ability to distinguish between experience and learning. Credit is awarded for the learning that has resulted from experience, not for the experiences themselves. This section provides an overview (for the assessor) of how the portfolio is organized, providing a 'map' of evidence pieces provided, where to find them, and which CLOs the evidence pieces prove learning against.

Begin to gather applicable evidence and think about how you will organize your evidence to make it easiest and most efficient for the assessor to review against the CLOs.

The following is an example of the template you should use to explain how your learning matches the course learning outcomes and where the evidence can be found.

	Course Learning Outcomes* (examples only – insert CLOs from course outline)	Where the learning was acquired	What documents will verify learning	Index (where it can be found in the Portfolio) See Item #7
1.	Manage an annual budget through the following phases: - plan a needs assessment - proposal - monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controller, ABC Company Nepean, ON • Human Resource Manager, Atlas Group Halifax, N.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Job Description - Atlas ✓ Sample of budget documents ✓ Letter from Jane Jones, Supervisor, Atlas, with completed competency checklist attached. 	<p>A</p> <p>B</p> <p>C</p>
2.	Prepare a program mission statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resource Manager, Atlas Group, Halifax, N.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Letter, from Jane Jones, Supervisor, Atlas, with completed competency checklist attached. ✓ Performance Appraisal 	<p>C</p> <p>F</p>

*The course outline for your course will indicate the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) to be proven. These CLOs must be inserted in this section. Your documents being used as evidence should be filed under A-Z index tabs.

6. Narrative on Course Learning Outcomes

This is a narrative providing an opportunity for you to describe and equate your experiential learning to the college-level academic knowledge and skill outcomes (CLOs) within the course. It is essentially a short description of how you learned each CLO, and how you put it into practice. It expands on the identified pieces of evidence noted in the Index to Documentation (noted in the cell above) providing your reflections on your own learning related to the CLOs and how you apply it now in other contexts (clear examples are helpful).

7. Documents to Support your learning (Evidence pieces)

The purpose of the documentation section of your portfolio is to provide evidence of the learning you have described. Just as students in a classroom must provide evidence of their learning in the form of book reports, oral presentations, research papers or examination results, so you will be expected to demonstrate – provide evidence - that you really possess the knowledge or skills you claim to have.

Documentation may take many forms. Some examples are:

- Course materials from workplace training sessions
- An official transcript of a company training course you've taken
- A videotape of you performing a skill or job task
- A letter from an employer outlining your job responsibilities and describing your performance, directly related to the CLOs
- Products you have created, such as files or samples of your computer skills (links to samples or other documentation forms), reports, plans etc.
- Pictures, blueprints, or other documents/samples of work completed.

Types of Documentation:

Documentation resources usually fall into two categories - direct and indirect. Direct documentation is the strongest to include in your portfolio.

a) Direct Documentation refers to products you have created, performances you have given, reports you have written, marketing plans you have produced, etc. In most cases, direct documentation serves as the strongest evidence that you really do know what you say you know or have the skills you say you have. You must be prepared to sign off that the evidence or product was created by you, or indicate your part in its development.

Examples of direct documentation include:

- Reports, proposals, or articles written by the learner
- Brochures, or posters created by the learner
- A presentation given by the learner - you could provide a videotape or a print copy of the presentation
- Software programs, blueprints, electronic circuits you have designed
- Any projects created by the learner which relate to the learning outcome

In all of these forms of direct documentation, there must be some form of validation that the photograph or tape or computer program is really yours or a clear indication of the part that you actually played in the preparation of the whole (i.e. you may have been part of a team). Original signatures, printed acknowledgments or other attestation may provide that validation, along with your title page sign-off that all documents are yours.

b) Indirect documentation is usually information about you and your accomplishments from other people. Examples include:

- Letters written on your behalf by employers, co-workers business partners, business consultants, teachers, church, community or government leaders, or professional association members
- Job descriptions with competencies verified by employer/supervisor by means of a performance appraisal
- Transcripts or certificates for training achieved (training that is not eligible for direct transfer of credit), supported by learning outcomes for such training
- Professional licenses and/or memberships in professional or trade organizations, supported by performance standards
- Awards, newspaper or magazine clippings about learner's activities

Ineffective or Weak sources of documentation, which should be avoided, include:

- Letters from family members
- Newspaper clippings about events in which you say you participated but which do not mention you; or job evaluations that are not specific about what you actually did or what skills you exhibited; an evaluation that merely states you were a good employee, or even a superb employee, is poor documentation for your skills and learning
- References documenting personal attributes which are not reflective of the learning outcomes - for example, "Jane Doe is friendly and well-mannered" ... is not useful documentation for a course in word processing.
- Job evaluations that are not specific about what you actually did or what skills you exhibited - even if they recount that you are a "superb employee"
- Information about events in which you claim to have participated, but which do not mention you directly and/or do not specify learning outcomes
- Any documentation which cannot be verified

What is the Assessor looking for in my documentation?

Some of the criteria against which the assessor is evaluating the nature of your documentation include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- **Relevance:** Is the documentation verifying learning which is both relevant and appropriate to the stated learning outcomes?
- **Validity:** Does the documentation relate to the learning outcomes for the course(s) for which credit is being sought? Does it relate to all of the stated learning outcomes?
- **Sufficiency:** Can the documentation, in total, serve as conclusive proof for the learning that has occurred? What else might be required?
- **Currency:** Is the documentation recent and up-to-date in relation to the standards?
- **Quality:** Is the documentation of good quality? Does it really verify the learning achieved and not just the experience? Remember that it is the quality, not the quantity of the documentation that is important
- **Authenticity:** Is the direct documentation really the work of the candidate? Can the learner provide proof that the work is really theirs? Does the indirect documentation give an accurate picture in support of the client's claims of competence?

How do I put the Portfolio Together?

The basic principle that should guide you in putting together your portfolio is this: make it easy for the reader to understand. Follow the organization you have noted in your Table of Contents (Index of Documentation) in #5 above. Your Portfolio should be:

- Selective, not overwhelming: Only those facts, documents, and data which are directly connected with your learning against the Course Learning Outcomes should be included in the portfolio. Avoid redundancy.
- Logically organized: The plan or arrangement of the document should enable your readers to follow your thinking as they review your evidence.
- Coherent: The connections among the parts should be understandable. Each section should be tied to the others and the assessor should not have to stop to question why you have included some information.
- Professional: Neat, grammatically correct and clearly written ideally it should be done through wordprocessing for appearance and ease of revision. Don't submit a hand written document.

Complete your Portfolio and review it for clarity, strength of evidence, completeness of contents against outcomes, and organization for ease of review by assessors (see the Pathways Coordinator at any stage if you have questions).

Ensure the contents of your Portfolio include evidence that meets the criteria for assessment (scoring chart) set by the program (i.e., what they are looking for in your evidence).

Submitting the Portfolio

The Portfolio should be submitted to the Pathways Coordinator. The portfolio will be examined to determine if all the components outlined in this guide are in place. In addition, the documentation section will be reviewed to determine if there is a clear link to the course learning outcomes. If the documentation does not appear to be substantial, you may need to supplement the document.

You should copy your portfolio and provide the copy to the Pathways Coordinator (with an original signed Title Page). You should keep the original copy of the portfolio.

The Pathways Coordinator will forward your portfolio to the assigned assessor.

Notification of Assessment Results

Once the Portfolio is returned by the assessor, you will be notified of the results by the Pathways Coordinator. The assessor will have completed a form detailing their assessment.