

Tangible Evidence

Creating Student Portfolios

By Emily Lipscombe, Elementary Department

Organizing children's paperwork can be rewarding and overwhelming—depending on how it's been managed throughout the year. But if you've ever watched first graders' eyes light up when they pull out old papers and compare an August journal entry to one produced the following May, you know how worthwhile the experience can be for *all* involved.

Thus, here are some ideas to help start the process of creating your children's portfolios.

Choose the “hardware.” What fits your budget and space limitations? Since storage buildings are not an option for most, what about three-ring binders, accordion file folders, or plastic storage bins?

Organize the “hardware.” For those on a tight budget, three-ring binders can be divided into subject areas using colored paper with tabs made from folded pieces of tape. For those wanting to save time, dividers can be purchased from your local office supply store. Accordion file folders usually have a space for subject titles, and storage bins can be labeled using permanent markers or slips of paper attached with tape or covered with contact paper.

Manage the “software.” Periodically, establish a time to review pieces reserved for the portfolio. This can be done weekly, monthly, or according to semester or unit study time frames. To avoid being caught “circular filing” papers, include your children in the process of choosing exemplary work to be kept in the portfolio. Hint: it may be helpful to establish guidelines ahead of time, i.e. five pieces per subject per semester that demonstrate mastery of concepts. Remember, too, that brochures and ticket stubs from field trips can bring back wonderful memories and teachable moments—so include these as well, either integrated with a subject or in a separate section.

Preserve the “software.” Page protectors can highlight and preserve exceptional pieces. Some work can be laminated or covered with clear contact paper. Don't forget to grab that artwork off the refrigerator!

Review the “hardware and software.” Be sure to enjoy moments looking through this memoir with your children. Also take time to review the system and revamp it in a way that best suits you and your family.

Remember that you, your children, grandparents, etc. may keep other tangible evidence of accomplishments outside the portfolio. The more exposure, the better! These are just suggestions to help you get started, and to make this an enjoyable, worthwhile activity for all involved!