

# The Educator Portfolio: A Tool for Career Development

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## Introduction

Career development and advancement of all medical faculty members—from basic scientists to clinicians—involves documentation of educational accomplishments. A well-planned educator portfolio (EP) can play a key role in advancing your career as an educator, for example, when you are

- Seeking a promotion or new job
- Conducting annual performance review and goal-setting
- Writing a biographical sketch
- Submitting a grant proposal
- Negotiating a raise
- Updating or creating your curriculum vitae
- Applying for a teaching award
- Meeting with your mentor or advisor

An educator portfolio is a written document that describes and details the strengths of your teaching and educational innovations. It complements the curriculum vitae as a comprehensive information source tracking your career as an educator. It measures the scope, quantity, and quality of your educational contributions. The format organizes information using established terminology that translates across academic institutions. This permits judgment about the institutional value of your work and its importance to the broader field of education. Putting this document together has the added advantage of encouraging reflection upon personal skills and accomplishments.

## Developmental vs. Promotional Educator Portfolios

Creation of an educator portfolio supports your professional growth and promotion endeavors. A developmental educator portfolio helps you intentionally plan and carefully record your educational activities. Periodic review and update of your developmental EP will help you to write a shorter, summarized version to submit for advancement. Table 1 compares these two types of educator portfolios.

## Comparison of a Developmental and Promotional Educator Portfolio

	Developmental Educator Portfolio	Promotional Educator Portfolio
Uses	Provides a broad perspective on educational activities Helps strategic planning through goal identification and setting Tracks activities and achievements over time Aids in reflection and improvement of educational activities over time Serves as a communication tool with a mentor or advisor	Highlights, showcases, and summarizes key educational achievements for promotion or advancement Assists in attaining status and visibility among academic peers, leaders or administrators

	Provides organized, written, specific information to develop a promotional educator portfolio	
<b>Who needs it?</b>	Any faculty members involved in education, starting with new appointees and continuing throughout a career in academic medicine	More senior faculty members applying for promotion or advancement
<b>Type</b>	Formative	Summative
<b>Scope</b>	Comprehensive	Focused
<b>Length</b>	Long (e.g., 25 pages) or unlimited	Short (e.g., 5-8 pages) and limited
<b>Timing</b>	Annual updates	When eligible for promotion or advancement

### Essential Elements of Educator Portfolios

Educator portfolios are judged by two principles. Excellence is measured by the quantity and quality of your educational activities. Engagement with the educational community is judged by evidence of a scholarly approach (evidence that the educator's work is informed by what is known in the field), or educational scholarship (how, over time, the educator contributes to the knowledge in the field). These principles are discussed further in [Educational Scholarship: How Do We Define and Acknowledge It?](#)

Any educational portfolio should include the following essential elements:

- Educational philosophy statement
- Five-year goals as an educator
- Educational contributions in any or all of five activity categories
  1. Teaching
  2. Learner Assessment
  3. Curriculum Development
  4. Mentoring and Advising
  5. Educational Leadership and Administration

**Check your institutional guidelines for promotion and tenure documentation to see if and how your institution uses an educator portfolio.**

Faculty from the Educational Scholars Program of the Academic Pediatrics Association (APA) have developed guidelines and a [Template for Educator Portfolios](#), which can be downloaded and adapted to match the unique mission and goals of your home institution.

This portfolio has been peer reviewed and published to [MedEdPORTAL](#), which provides multiple resources for educational scholarship in addition to this document.

### Frequently Asked Questions About Educator Portfolios

Whether you are creating your first educator portfolio, or updating your current one, it helps to receive expert advice. The authors have put their heads together to respond to some of the most frequently asked questions heard while teaching or advising faculty members in the APA Educational Scholars Program.

#### 1. How can I clearly describe my teaching activities?

The heart of any educator portfolio is the presentation of teaching activities. It is more than a simple list: it is an opportunity to demonstrate the impact of your teaching with much more detail than a curriculum vitae allows.

**Describe Quantity:** Summarize teaching data - time spent in each teaching activity and how often it is repeated, number and types of learners involved, and how the activity fits into a curriculum or training program. The APA template provides a useful table for summarizing this information.

**Describe Quality through Process and Impact:** Describe carefully (but briefly) the efforts you put into planning your teaching activities. By explaining how you customize your teaching through the use of innovative and creative teaching methods to accomplish the learning objectives, you show the impact of your teaching in a way that goes beyond numbers. Exhibit your flexibility as a teacher - do you use special teaching strategies to promote interaction with and between learners? Do you motivate learners by providing opportunities for integration and application of the content you teach? Do you encourage further self directed learning after the teaching activity ends?

**Interpret Quality through Outcomes:** Finally, express what you have learned and how you define success. Are you collecting data to demonstrate your teaching effectiveness? Do you use this data to inform your future teaching? How do you use information from learners to choose the appropriate teaching method to meet their needs?

## **2. My school uses conventional evaluation forms for instructors. Can I prove the quality of my teaching by additional methods?**

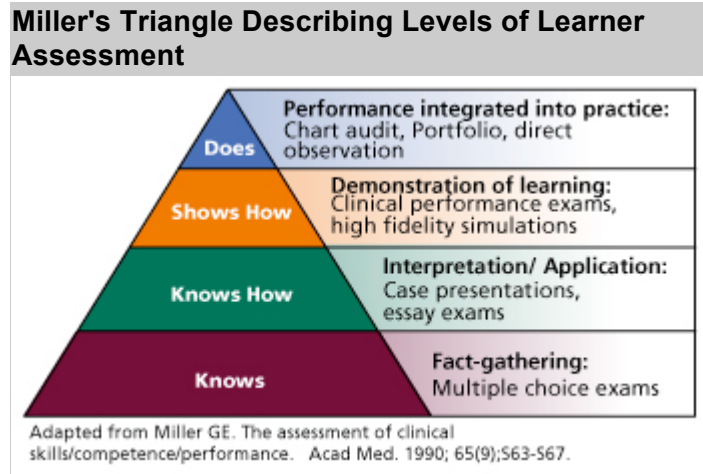
Teaching evaluations focus on the quality and outcomes of the teaching performed. The information provides an opportunity to see yourself through the eyes of others. To develop as an educator, you need to reflect upon such evaluation data and use what you learn to inform and refine your educational practice. The better the data you collect, the more you have to document in your portfolio.

**Look for a variety of sources of feedback:** If the teaching evaluations at your institution are confined to learner opinion questionnaires, you may need to gather additional data to enable your improvement as an educator. Think broadly about the "stakeholders" in your educational activity: students, peers, supervisors, educational experts, and most important, yourself! Call in a peer to observe your teaching, or invite an educational specialist to critique a sample of your work. Use these reviews to reflect upon and revise your teaching, and keep meticulous records for documentation in your educator portfolio.

**Use a blend of evaluation methods:** Checklists and standardized rating forms with Likert scales are easy to administer and give excellent quantitative information that can be compared across teachers. An efficient quantitative evaluation form can include some broad questions asking for open-ended qualitative responses. Interviews and focus groups, although labor intensive, may be worth the effort to assess a new activity or teaching method. Qualitative data can give you a new perspective on the underlying themes of your program.

### 3. How can I demonstrate that my strategies improved learning?

While standard course evaluation forms provide important information about learners' perspectives and experience, they may be insufficient to demonstrate learning as a result of your teaching or educational design. Consider developing or importing supplementary assessment tools that document the skills, attitudes and behaviors that you aim to teach. This can include asking learners to do a self-evaluation in parallel with your evaluation, comparing notes with them in a face-to-face interaction, and then describing how you used the feedback to improve subsequent teaching.



**Select the best tools to demonstrate changes in knowledge and behaviors.** It is important to select the most appropriate tool for assessment of the changes you wish to affect. A multiple choice test will not effectively measure improvement in skill and a clinical performance test may not be the best tool to measure fundamental learning of concepts and vocabulary. Three references may be particularly useful in selecting appropriate assessment tools: the [ACGME Toolbox of Assessment Methods](#) describes a variety of assessment methods, the [APGO Curriculum Builder](#) offers an interesting model for curriculum design that is linked to competencies and [Miller's Triangle](#) provides a useful conceptual model for selecting appropriate methods. Be sure to indicate any assessment tools that you have developed yourself.

**Consider feasibility:** Do not attempt to measure everything perfectly. Efficient measures might be used to address broad questions, while methods that are more intensive seek to answer highly focused questions. For example, you might evaluate a new module on taking history and physical examinations with direct observations of the students' performance of these skills. Select one component of the physical examination, since observing a complete a history and physical examination for every learner will likely be impractical.

**Describe the changes in learning in your portfolio.** You may wish to administer an evaluation tool before and after the lesson in order to measure the effect of your teaching on student knowledge and behaviors. List your additional best efforts at evaluation along with the institutional standardized evaluations (consider grouping the latter together so they don't overwhelm the list).

Your portfolio should succinctly describe your methods, the context in which they are used, specific outcome measures, your role in learner evaluation (development, implementation, and analysis) and the results of the evaluations conducted. These results should include not only how many learners "passed" but also what you learned about your performance as a teacher from the analysis of results.

### 4. We conducted a project to evaluate our residency program, and even though we didn't publish a scholarly report, I want to present its scholarly qualities in my portfolio. How do I do that?

In your educator portfolio, try to assemble evidence to demonstrate that your project meets the standards of a scholarly approach or educational scholarship, as discussed in the Faculty Vitae feature article: [Educational Scholarship: How Do We Define and Acknowledge It?](#) If it doesn't qualify in these

categories, then plan your next project so it will do so! A little planning at the front end of a project can make all the difference in showing that a structured approach was used.

**A scholarly approach** is demonstrated by your use of the literature to plan your evaluation project. It is characterized by careful planning and thoughtful reflection on one's educational practice. We find that it is often helpful to use Glassick's criteria to show that a project was planned in a scholarly fashion. These criteria are an adaptation to the educational setting of standards often used to evaluate clinical research.

<b>Glassick's Criteria for Excellence in Educational Scholarship</b>	
<b>Criteria and Definitions</b>	<b>Examples for Potential Inclusion in an EP</b>
<b>Clear Goals:</b> stated purpose, realistic objectives, important questions	Planning of teaching module around curricular goals and needs of specific target group  Hypothesis-based educational research
<b>Adequate preparation:</b> understanding of literature, appropriate skills, needed resources	Education guided by prior assessment of learners  Use of best practices in curriculum development  Faculty development preceding new teaching activity
<b>Appropriate methods:</b> choice of methods that match goals, effective use and flexible application of methods	Use of teaching/learning methods that suit a variety of learning styles  Selection of teaching methods that maximize the educational potential of a clinical setting  Use of performance-based learner assessments
<b>Significant results:</b> goals are achieved, results are important, field is advanced	Strong learner outcomes from valid and reliable evaluations  Published papers  Adoption of models by other institutions
<b>Effective presentation:</b> presentation well organized, forums appropriate, message clear and sound	Successful workshops and platform presentations  Peer-reviewed publications and approved grants  Successful garnering of institutional support for new programs
<b>Reflective critique:</b> work critically evaluated, supported with good evidence, evaluation used to improve future studies	Thoughtful response to one's teaching assessments  Review of evaluation data from new curriculum to plan refinement  Systematic review of learner assessments to guide program improvement

The **criteria for educational scholarship** are more exacting. You should show that your work has:

1. passed peer review by a community of educational scholars,
2. been disseminated and therefore is a genuine contribution to the community, and
3. has been used by others as a platform for their work.

In addition to listing your publications and providing data on citations of your articles, look for evidence that others have been influenced by or adapted your work.

**5. I can easily describe what I teach and why, but I have no idea how to describe my philosophy as an educator. How can I think about this topic in an organized way?**

Expect your educational philosophy to evolve with your experience as an educator. Don't lose heart if your first effort is a struggle—you will grow as you flex your intellectual muscles and sharpen your perception of what "really" matters to you as a teacher!

A strong educational philosophy statement describes application of a structured and thoughtful approach, and grounding in educational experience. Your teaching beliefs should evolve from your understanding of theory coupled with your reflection on your teaching experiences. Thus, it is helpful to be familiar with the literature on medical education and effective teaching strategies used by educators in other fields.

Although the philosophy statement is traditionally the first section of the educator portfolio, we suggest writing this section last, so the principles discussed reflect the rest of the portfolio. The reviewers are likely to study your educational philosophy and then look for examples throughout the portfolio that demonstrate a commitment to these principles.

Answering the questions below may help to organize your thoughts.

**Questions to reflect upon before writing about your educational philosophy**

1. Looking broadly at the way I like to teach, what is my approach to education?
2. Thinking about why I teach as I do, what principles appear to underlie my teaching?
3. What are the characteristics of a good teacher and a good learner?
4. What are the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers?
5. What are my thoughts about how people learn?
6. What environmental factors promote or impede learning?
7. What personal or interpersonal factors promote or impede learning?
8. How do I decide on the goals of instruction? How are these goals affected by the needs and expectations of learners, the teaching setting, community needs, etc.
9. What factors influence my choice of teaching and evaluation strategies?
10. What are my special strengths as a teacher? What makes me most proud in my practice as an educator?
11. How can I illustrate my educational philosophy or principles with examples from my own teaching experience?

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