LEARN NC

Showcase your skills with an electronic teaching portfolio

This article shares tips and instructions for creating an electronic teaching portfolio using Google Sites.

BY GRETCHEN SCHAEFER

Teachers have long used portfolios to highlight their education and teaching experience, show evidence of growth, and share examples of their own learning experiences in the classroom. A portfolio is a valuable tool when seeking a new position, for assessing professional growth in an existing position, or to keep a record of your teaching career. In a typical oral question-and-answer interview, you can explain how you taught a certain lesson or unit, but with a portfolio, you can show evidence of how and why the way you taught that lesson worked best for your class.

Your portfolio might even include a reflection that explains how you changed the instruction method or materials used, and how the lesson has evolved since the first time you taught it. Sharing student work as part of your portfolio can illustrate how the students responded to the lesson as well. It can also serve as a record of your professional development — in addition to keeping a current resume on file, certificates and awards can be added to a portfolio to show how you've continued your education beyond initial certification.

Traditionally, portfolios were often created using three-ring binders or scrapbooks to organize a collection of physical information. But the paper teaching portfolio usually exists only as a single copy, so it can't be accessed by others without physically receiving it. An electronic portfolio, on the other hand, can be accessed by more than just one person at a time, which can be valuable when you are submitting resumes for several positions. It allows hiring committees time to review your work before meeting you in person, and it removes some of the worry that that single copy (with no backup) might be lost if handed to the wrong person. In addition to being accessible by multiple people, an electronic portfolio provides concrete proof that you have a grasp of how to use technology effectively — and how to incorporate it into your professional practice.

The ups and downs of Google Sites

Security and privacy will always be a concern, thanks to FERPA. Google Sites is a great application for creating an online portfolio for a number of reasons, one of which is its great privacy controls. Google makes it easy to make your site private, to share it with select individuals, or to make it entirely public and open to the world. Changing the sharing settings is a click away. If you're submitting resumes, include a link and a note explaining how the hiring committee can access your portfolio. In an interview, you can come prepared to share it. If you want to keep your portfolio private, the viewer will need to request access from you. Alternatively, you can make it public for the period after sending your resume and waiting for interviews.

Google sites provides many other benefits: It is free, has no ads, is customizable, and because it's a Google product, it works seamlessly with Google Docs, YouTube, Google Calendar, Picasa web albums… you get the picture.

In addition, a portfolio created in Google Sites is never married to a school's servers, so long after a teacher or student is no longer affiliated with a school, she can keep updating and accessing her portfolio, without worrying about eventually being pushed out to make way for current faculty and students. And, like many Google products, Sites is very simple to edit and maintain. If you want your own domain name, you can purchase it and have it redirect to your Google Sites page.

It's not all perfect. For instance, you can't download the source files easily, although that's rumored to eventually be possible. Also, while Sites offers pre-designed themes and allows you to change colors throughout your site, you can't install custom themes. The user-created templates you can use vary in quality. These limitations, however, are what make Google Sites fairly foolproof, both for creators and for readers. And if you're really committed to other services that don't mesh well with Google Sites, you can use the Site as a portal to your entire online presence.

Setting up

Screenshot showing the author's electronic portfolio, created in Google Sites. (Photograph by the author. More about the photograph)

Instructify

This article also appears on Instructify, LEARN NC's technology integration blog. Visit Instructify for other ideas on finding useful, free technology to use in the classroom.

Learn more

- Dr. Helen Barrett's electronic portfolios A comprehensive resource on creating and maintaining an electronic teaching portfolio, including tools, resources,

The two main applications you'll use to create your portfolio will be Google Docs and Google Sites. Google Docs allows you to create and edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations online, and allows you to share what you create with the world, or with a select group of people. Google Sites allows you to easily create a website to showcase your work with whatever level of access you choose: You can share your portfolio with everyone, restrict to a select group of people, or keep it totally private.

To get started, you'll need to create an account with Google. Remember, this email address will be attached to your site, so you'll want to make sure it's not unprofessional — skip your usual CookieQueen screen name and stick with something that includes your name — MarySmith or SmithM. It's a little thing that can have a big impact later.

You'll also benefit from having access to a few tech tools to help you along, particularly to facilitate including media. For example, you might want to take a picture of a completed classroom project, share a video of yourself explaining a concept, or just scan files that were not created electronically, such as a student's completed assignment. Some helpful media tools include a photo scanner, digital camera, and digital camcorder (some still cameras have a video recording feature built in). Free image-editing sites like Picnik can help you edit photos and scans of student work. To edit video, use free software like iMovie (Mac) or Moviemaker (PC).

Selecting content

What kind of information do you want to put in this portfolio? Everything you've ever done, ever? Your best work? It depends. Having a framework like teaching standards or classroom curriculum helps you plot out your portfolio.

If you're a student teacher, you've been learning a lot and creating ideas for teaching others over the last few years. By the time you reach your student teaching semester, you've probably already spent some time in a classroom, and you're excited to put the hard work of the last few years to good use.

If you're a veteran teacher, maybe you're hoping to showcase your work over the length of your career, or you want to create a portfolio that highlights how you've incorporated new learning into an established career, or perhaps you're applying for a new position. Maybe you want your students to create portfolios of their work. There are many reasons that teachers and students might want to create a portfolio.

The hardest part of any portfolio design should be about selecting the content that is included, not the technology with which it's presented. The most beautifully designed portfolio is nothing without meaningful and connected content. Before getting started, know what your framework is going to look like — sketch it out on paper, even. It will make the process of putting your website together easier. That principle applies to any type of web project — storyboarding and planning helps organize your thoughts and content, and should always be your first step.

The first thing you'll want is examples of your work. Lesson plans, classroom newsletters, even photos of word walls or bulletin boards or other classroom materials can be included. Video can be captured with the help of another teacher, colleague, or even a student. Have them get a clip of you teaching a concept to the class (paying attention to student privacy, of course) or even a personal statement. Other video media could include a YouTube clip you used as part of a lesson.

In addition to content you've created, consider adding some of your students' work, particularly work that highlights what they've learned from a lesson plan you've written and implemented. Maybe a student wrote a particularly great reading journal entry, or even drew a neat picture for you. Why not add it? Be judicious: You don't need to include every journal entry and assessment and art project, but select a few that will showcase your students' learning and your teaching.

And of course, include your reflections. Effective teachers are reflective in their practice, which is why many teaching programs require student teachers to reflect on their experiences in many ways. Your reflections will help connect your lessons and your own education to your practice. And, of course, reflecting on your practice doesn't stop when you land a contract; including reflections as a veteran teacher will help demonstrate that you are committed to your own learning.

In addition, letters of recommendation can be scanned and added (you may want to check with the writer before publishing their name on the web, or black out their name on the web version for their privacy), as well as test scores, transcripts, certificates and other awards. You may also want to add some personal information — if you love to go hiking with your family, consider including a photo of that. Don't make it your personal blog, but adding some personal touches might just give potential employers or current students an idea of what you are like beyond the classroom.

Creating your site

GETTING STARTED

Start by going to Google Sites. After entering your Google password, you're ready to build your site. Templates are a relatively new feature for sites, and anyone can submit a template. At some point you may want to create a template for your own students to use or explore templates for a classroom website, but for this example, we'll start with a blank template. Here is a run-down of some of your first options:

and specific applications, as well as a special feature on the role of reflection in the teaching portfolio.

- Dr. Helen Barrett's professional portfolio An example of an electronic portfolio created in Google Sites, created by e-portfolio expert Dr. Helen Barrett.

- Electronic portfolios in the K-12 classroom This article from *Education World* explores using electronic portfolios with students. It discusses the process of portfolio development, the benefits of using an electronic format, and some basic best practices. Includes links to additional resources.

Site name

> This is what your visitors will see. It can be changed later, but as you type, the site URL automatically become the same as the site name. The URL can't be changed later, so pay close attention to that field.

> If you do find you've made an egregious typo — "Gretchen's Eduacation Portfolio," for example — you can always copy over a website to a new URL. So, while you do have an escape hatch, let this serve as a reminder to watch your spelling!

Theme

> Leave this as default as you get started. It can be changed once the site is created, and at any time after that.
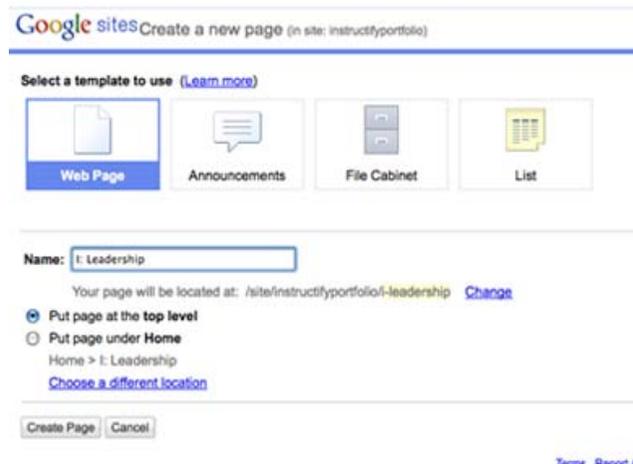
Options

> Click on the + sign to expand this. The default setting is a public view; change that to "only people I invite" as you are building your portfolio. Make sure you don't check off the adult content box: Yes, you are an adult and the people who will view your portfolio (internship mentors, faculty, hiring administrators) are adults, but any school with a filter will automatically block the site for thinking it is obscene.

Once your site is created, you'll end up at the home page. Your site name appears across the top, and you'll see the three main buttons you'll use to build your site: "Create Page," "Edit Page," and "More Actions."

Creating pages

For this example, we'll assume that I'm a student teacher looking to demonstrate that I've met the teacher standards for North Carolina. (These can be found at the LEARN NC website.)

> I want my lessons to reflect that I've met the North Carolina Standards, so I'll use the "Create Page" button to create a page for each standard. I'll name the first blank page "I: Leadership," and keep it at the top level.

Creating a page.

Once the page is created, it shows up in the sidebar and the page will be opened in edit mode, so I won't see Create/Edit/More Action buttons. Because I'm just building the outline right now, I'll leave the page otherwise blank, save it, and continue adding new pages for each standard. I'll also create a page for my philosophy of education and a page for my credentials.

> But, wait! Doing that put "Philosophy" between standards IV and V on my sidebar, and that's not where I want it! Now it's time to edit the sidebar.

Edit sidebar

Help

Please read our disclaimer for lesson plans.

Legal

The text of this page is copyright ©2010. See terms of use. Images and other media may be licensed separately; see captions for more information and read the fine print.

The "Edit Sidebar" link appears under the list of pages. Clicking the link takes you to the site layout page. The "Edit Navigation" link brings up the form for customizing the toolbar. To customize, uncheck "automatically arrange my sidebar." Click "add page" to add a page to the toolbar and use the arrows to move a page up or down. If there's a page in your sidebar that you don't want, highlight the page and click on the x. It doesn't delete your page form the site; it just deletes the link from your sidebar. When it's set up to your specifications, click on "ok," and then click on "Save Changes" on the main layout page.

Site layout

While we're here, let's talk about site layout. The default is to have the sidebar on the left and a logo header across the top. You can alter this somewhat by choosing "Change Site Layout." It's not infinitely tweakable, but that's part of what makes it easy to set up.

There are 52 themes to choose from, and you can preview your choice before changing it completely. "Colors and Fonts" allows you to tweak your theme design even further.
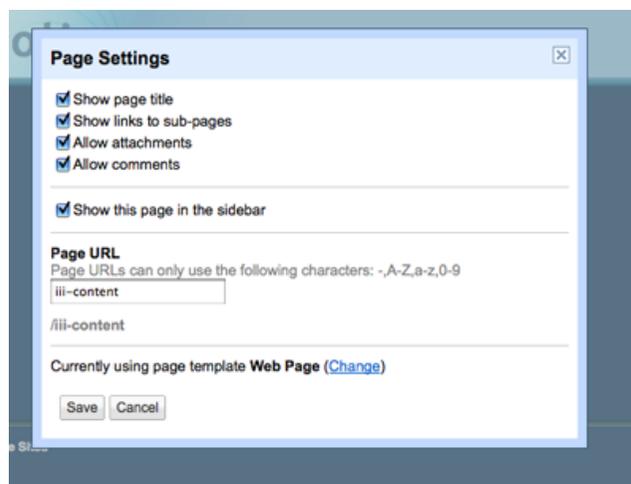
Now, let's change the title of the site. I'm not going to change the name, but I don't want "instructifyportfolio" to run together and appear as one word. If I click on "General," I can go to the general site settings and edit my site name. Remember, this does *not* change the URL. I've changed it to "Instructify Portfolio," here, and there are other options — some more advanced if you want to track statistics, for instance. "Copy this Site" allows you to move your site to a new URL, "Save as Template" allows you to add to the template gallery, and "Delete" allows you to delete — be very careful with that one!

EDITING YOUR SITE

Page level

Editing at the page level is very simple. The toolbar that pops up when you're in edit mode looks familiar to anyone who's used a word processing program. You can change the alignment, font and font properties, and insert tables, links, and other media. Choosing HTML allows code-level access, and this can be used to insert media from non-Google sites, like Vimeo or Flickr.

HTML mode also allows advanced users to troubleshoot the content of the page — it's limited HTML access, but can be helpful. Choosing "More Actions" allows you can change page settings, which affects the view at the page level. For instance, I can remove the comments option on this page by unchecking the box. I can also change the URL — "content" seems somehow cleaner than "iii-content."
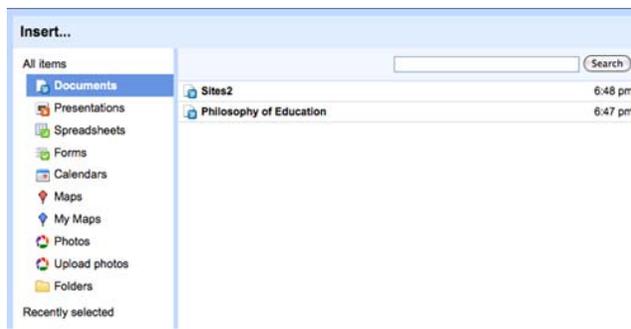

Editing page settings.

Inserting documents

Google Docs is another great part of the Google suite that allows you to create and store files online, which means you can access them from wherever you have an internet connection. When you have files stored in Google Docs, inserting lengthy documents is made easy in Sites. Integrating Google Docs into a site can also be a space-saver: If you're approaching the 100mb limit, storing files like your teaching philosophy in Docs and embedding them in your site won't count against your

server space.

To make sure that a Google document is viewable to site visitors, publish the document as a web page in Google Docs. To do this, click on "share," choose "publish as web page," check off "automatically re-publish when changes are made," and save. If you don't do this step, your document will be visible to you but not accessible by others viewing your site.

To embed a document in your site, go to "edit page," choose "insert," and then select "document." A list of your stored documents will appear. Click on the document you want to insert and some options will appear. If you want to change anything there, you can, but you can also edit those options later. Click "OK" and you'll see a blank box as a placeholder, with a toolbar hovering over it for alignment, text wrapping, and properties. When you click "save," you'll see the embedded document.
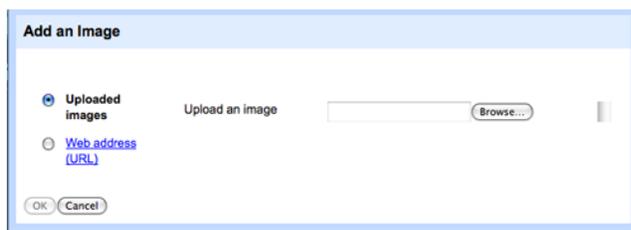

Inserting a Google Document.

You can embed text documents, presentations, or spreadsheets directly from Google Docs. If you have a PDF, you can provide a link to the PDF, or attach it as a file and provide a link to the downloadable file. But note that Sites doesn't offer automatic preview for PDFs.

Inserting media

Inserting other media is easy, and having media to support your portfolio is important. Before using photos or videos of students, make sure you have the proper permission. If you don't, you can capture and select media while still maintaining the privacy of students. Take pictures of the works in progress, not necessarily the student working. If a student makes his way into a photo, some photo editing will allow you to crop him out or mask his face. If a project has a student's name on it, editing the photo to remove that information is easy to do. (For more on editing images to protect student privacy, see this Instructify blog post.)

On the site, go to the page where you'd like to include an image. Let's say you have photos from your culture fair that you'd like to include on the diversity page. On the top left, click on "insert," and choose "image." You'll get a choice of "uploaded images" or image from URL. Choose "uploaded images" and upload the image just as you would attach one to an email. Don't use the URL version unless you own the image in question and have control over the URL. If you don't have control over the URL image, it could disappear or be replaced by an image that makes no sense in your portfolio.

Adding an image.

After the image is uploaded, a toolbar will appear when you click on it in edit mode. L-C-R allows you to align it either left, center, or right. Size options allow you to resize to fit the page appropriately, and "wrap" refers to text wrapping — if you want text to appear next to the image, and not just above or below it, turn on text wrapping.

Videos can be added in two different ways:

- The "insert" menu offers the option to insert a video from Google Video or YouTube.
- If you're using a site like Vimeo or Flickr, you can manually embed video. On the edit page toolbar, click on the "html" button. Copy the embed code from your video-sharing site and paste it into the text box that pops up.

SHARING

To share your portfolio, go to "more actions," and "sharing." There are three options for inviting others to your portfolio. They can be owners, collaborators, or viewers. Viewers can see the site but can't make changes. Collaborators are allowed to edit content on the site, and owners are allowed to edit content *and* invite or delete other users as well.

If you are sending the site link along with a resume, or to your students to view, choose "viewers" when inviting them. If you are using Sites for a classroom project, invite students as collaborators, and not owners, for example. If you'd like to make your site public, checking the box that says "Anyone in the world may view this site" will open it for public viewing.

REVIEWING

Before submitting your portfolio for final review or sending it to prospective employers, have a few people review it for you. Have them click all the links, and ask them to write down any questions or concerns they might have ("Your lesson plan on standard two shows a blank box that says I need to email you for access.") Make sure that your spelling and grammar are correct, and, above all, that your portfolio presents you as a professional.

In a nutshell

- Create a Google account.
- Be professional in choosing user names and site names.
- Know the framework you plan to use for your portfolio.
- Prepare content.
- Support content with media.
- Connect content and media with reflections on your teaching.
- Seek critiques from others.
- Share your site.
- Include your portfolio URL in cover letters and resumes.
- Continue reflective practice by updating your portfolio as your career continues.