



High School Essential Skills Portfolio Guide

The compiled wisdom of faculty, staff, and students over many years

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Purpose of the Portfolio

Portfolios are an integral form of authentic assessment at The New School. Elementary and junior high students prepare portfolios for annual review; these are partially based on the twelve Essential Skills that are regarded as one of the pillars of a New School education. Students in grades 9 through 11 are required to work toward completion of a portfolio that shows the student's growth and mastery of the twelve Essential Skills. A successful defense of the completed portfolio demonstrates readiness for the senior curriculum.

Collecting Items for the Portfolio

As the 1st quarter progresses, students work in their advisories on selecting items of relevant classwork and other material that demonstrates progress in the Essential Skills. Each advisory group focuses on four Essential Skills per quarter, and each student gathers an example of their work towards that skill. Students also fill out Essential Skills reflection sheets with their insights about their own work, preferably when the items are still fresh in their minds. At the beginning of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters, students meet with a group from different grades and advisories to discuss questions involving the four Essential Skills examined during the previous quarter, and then share items that best demonstrate their use of these skills. By the end of the 3rd quarter, each 9th-, 10th, and 11th-grade student should have collected at least one appropriate tangible item for each skill and reviews the portfolio's contents with his/her advisor.

As the student progresses through high school, later work may be of better quality than earlier pieces. Students should not, however, remove earlier items, as a collection of items showing growth in understanding and use of the skills is the best way to demonstrate progress toward mastery.

Portfolio items can be anything. They can consist of, but are not limited to, papers, tests, worksheets, designs, CDs or DVDs of work, artwork, graphs, essays, creative writing, event programs, self-created websites, posters, logbooks, awards, computer programs, and photos of events or things too big to include in the portfolio. The chosen items should be representative of the student's continued development toward mastery of skills, whether in or outside of school. The portfolio does not have to be limited to a binder; several students have successfully developed and maintained digital portfolios. Items should not be included or excluded simply on the basis of the letter grade. Sometimes the lessons learned from a failure are most helpful in understanding how one could have used a skill more effectively.

Narrative reflections in essay form are also acceptable as secondary portfolio items. A student may write about an experience in which he/she used or learned a skill, and what was gained from the experience. Narrative reflections may be supported by further documentation, such as photographs, letters, and videos.

Don't limit yourself to obvious items. Think outside the box!

Here are some examples of portfolio items:

- A Junior used pictures, his calendar, and a letter of appreciation to explain how he used the skill of *Managing Materials and Time to Accomplish Goals* to get through his Eagle Scout project successfully before his 18th birthday.
- Another Junior showed a progression of sketches and drawings on the way toward designing “the right kind of wings” for her final art piece.
- A Freshman showed the results of a group project, and explained how he learned how to work better with his fellow students to achieve their goals for the skill of *Working Collaboratively*.
- A Sophomore talked about the difficulties of building a bridge, pointing to items with measurements, designs, calculations, photos, and a successful exhibition for the skill of *Solving Problems*.
- Another used several Spanish vocabulary quizzes and a paragraph in Spanish about a movie she had watched to show how she was *Making Connections and Being Aware of Context*.
- Several students used their Geometry class ABC Books for *Working Creatively*; some others used carefully drawn observational illustrations from their biology lab-books for the same skill.
- One student, for the skill of *Thinking and Acting Ethically*, wrote several paragraphs about what she learned about the difficulty of making fair decisions while serving on the Fairness Committee.
- A Sophomore recorded a skit in French for *Communicating Effectively*.
- Another student wrote about an experience in one of his community service activities, describing how he came to *Appreciate and Understand Different Perspectives* in that situation, and explained how he is now more capable of applying the skill to future situations. He also added “action photos.”
- One Sophomore was proud of how she essentially taught herself a chapter of Geometry, *Working Independently*, but was then able to *Work Collaboratively* by helping a fellow student with the concepts.
- A Junior *Researched Effectively* through decades of old movies and photographs for the costumes of a major play, and then wrote a research paper about the subject.

Freshman and Sophomore Portfolio Conferences

During the 4th quarter of the school year, each student will lead a portfolio conference with their advisor, at least one other teacher, parents/guardians, and interested others. The purpose of this conference is to check in on the student’s portfolio progress, identify areas of accomplishment and need for improvements, and consider course choices for the following academic year. This also prepares the student for the Junior Portfolio Defense.

The Junior Portfolio Defense

Early in the 4th quarter of the junior year, each student is required to have a completed portfolio. If a Junior has not met with the advisor for a preview of the complete portfolio, and/or seems ill-prepared, the advisor may recommend postponement of the defense. At the scheduled conference, the Junior presents the portfolio to a review committee consisting of his/her advisor, at least one other teacher, parents/guardians, and interested others. The order and means of presentation can be very individual, but the portfolio presentation should be well-organized. The committee discusses not only individual items but also the strengths and weaknesses of the Junior's skills. After consultation with the review committee, the student's advisor enters a pass/fail grade in PowerSchool, with comments. A successful portfolio review during the junior year indicates a student's readiness to start work on the Senior Exhibition and establishes eligibility for Senior Privileges.

Students who enter The New School as juniors must still complete the portfolio requirement by the end of junior year (although those students have until the end of the summer before their senior year to complete the community service requirement). Some portfolio items may be samples of work from the student's previous high school.

Following verification of a successful portfolio defense, pending parental approval (see Val for forms), Senior Privileges may begin in the final quarter of junior year. Students who have not completed their portfolios are not eligible for Senior Privileges. They are also in danger of failing the Senior Exhibition process and not completing graduation requirements. A failing grade for the Junior Essential Skills Portfolio can only be removed by successfully presenting new evidence for missing or inadequate skills to the advisor and the High School Portfolio Coordinator. After verification of completion, the school administrator changes the grade to pass.

The New School's 12 Essential Skills

Following is a list of life skills The New School considers essential for our students to master before graduating. In compiling this list, we have consulted members of the Coalition of Essential Schools, college professors, and business people to make it as meaningful as possible. These brief descriptions represent the parameters of each skill.

The person's relationship with others:

1. Acting in the benefit of the community
 - a. Recognize you are part of a community and/or communities
 - b. Understand the needs of the community
 - c. Decide how you can fulfill the needs of the community
 - d. Compromise if the needs of the community are different than yours
 - e. See your actions through to the end
2. Thinking and acting ethically
 - a. Recognize others and the community

- b. Consider and understand your actions before you act
 - c. Perceive positive and negative consequences for others, yourself and the environment for all actions
 - d. Accept and deal with consequences
3. Working collaboratively
- a. Listen and respond appropriately
 - b. Construct and follow group guidelines
 - c. Assign, understand and complete tasks on time
 - d. Follow and implement guidelines
 - e. Contribute individually to the goals of the group or class

The person's ability to express him or herself:

4. Communicating effectively
- a. Understand subject matter
 - b. Conceptualize or outline the subject to be communicated
 - c. Translate the concept into a meaningful visual, oral, written, physical, or musical form
 - d. Transmit the concept clearly, concisely and appropriately
 - e. Verify effectiveness of communication through some form of feedback
5. Working creatively
- a. Recognize habits and methods of yourself and others in the field of study and community
 - b. Understand the purpose of the habits and methods of yourself and others in the field of study and community
 - c. Experiment with different materials, concepts, and purposes in relation to the context of those habits and methods
 - d. Design new methods by combining elements from different habits and methods
6. Solving problems
- a. Recognize the opportunity to solve problems
 - b. Define or formulate the problem or question
 - c. Brainstorm possible solutions
 - d. Test and evaluate solutions
 - e. Verify the process

The person's ability to discover and construct answers:

7. Persisting in achieving quality
- a. Identify quality work
 - b. Integrate feedback appropriately
 - c. Redo or rework projects/work/papers/experiments
8. Applying effective research methods
- a. Find information

- b. Formulate a question
 - c. Collect appropriate information
 - d. Organize information
 - e. Process/analyze information
 - f. Make information meaningful
9. Managing materials and time to accomplish goals
- a. Organize sub-tasks of projects
 - b. Determine materials needed for each sub-task
 - c. Establish the time needed for each sub-task
 - d. Set a realistic plan and timeline
 - e. Stick to the plan and timeline

The person's ability to think critically:

10. Working independently
- a. Complete homework and class work
 - b. Work without supervision
 - c. Be prepared for class/task/project/etc.
 - d. Take chances by making choices
11. Appreciating and understanding different perspectives
- a. Suspend your judgment, open your mind and receive the whole perspective
 - b. Put yourself in another person's shoes
 - c. Be able to argue the other person's perspective
 - d. Evaluate the perspective's authenticity
 - e. Respond and react to evaluation ethically
12. Making connections and being aware of context
- a. Recognize the importance of information you already know
 - b. Look at the subject in relationship to its context
 - c. Recognize similarities and differences between what you already know about the subject and new information learned about the subject
 - d. Analyze the significance of those similarities and differences
 - e. Synthesize the information to gain new knowledge

Community Service Guidelines

One of our Essential Skills is *Acting in the Benefit of the Community*. Toward that end, The New School requires every student to serve his/her various communities as one of the portfolio requirements. Students are required to complete 60 hours of community service by the end of the 3rd quarter of their junior year. Students may serve these hours at any number of organizations whose expressed purpose is first and foremost to benefit their community. They may serve up to 20 of their hours by helping out at officially sanctioned New School activities.

To complete the 60-hour goal, we recommend 20 hours of community service during each of the freshman, sophomore, and junior years. Summers are also a great time for students to complete their hours. Students who join The New School during their sophomore or junior years must still complete 60 hours of community service. We recognize that this might prove difficult for juniors who have not acquired any community service hours prior to coming to The New School. Thus, these students will be given until the beginning of their senior year to complete this requirement without suffering any consequences.

Documenting Community Service Hours and Establishing Accountability:

Students may print out a Community Service Log Sheet from this handbook; this form is also available in the Media Center. After the students complete a community service event, they will record the date, the name of the organization, the duties performed, and the number of hours worked. If the hours were served at The New School, the supervising teacher needs to sign off on them. Should any activity be called into question, the High School Director is the final arbiter. During the final portfolio review in the spring, advisors will check that all hours have been documented correctly on the submitted sheets. Students should provide contact information, so advisors are able to contact the organization for verification of service. Letters from organizations, including hours served, are welcome as verification of service. They are also very useful in the college and scholarship application process. Photographs, videos, etc. may be included as supplementary documentation, but do not take the place of the Log Sheet. Completion of required community service hours is mandatory for students to pass the portfolio defense, become seniors, and receive senior privileges.

What Does Not Count Toward Community Service Hours?

1. Work done for friends or family (because it is expected that you will help out)
2. Work done to serve a class (because that is viewed as normal school duties)
3. Work done for pay (because that's not volunteering)

What Does Count Toward Community Service Hours?

1. Volunteering at a school-sponsored community service event, such as Open Houses
2. Arranging volunteer opportunities on your own time (such as helping at a soup kitchen)
3. Volunteering for any not-for-profit organization, including unpaid internships

Junior Portfolio Checklist

A completed portfolio is an organized selection of a student's work and accomplishments throughout his/her high school career. In order to successfully pass the Junior Portfolio Conference, the following items are required:

- At least one appropriate item of tangible evidence, although multiple items are preferred, demonstrating understanding, use, growth, and reasonable mastery of each skill.

- At least one research paper demonstrating mastery of research skills, including a reasonable thesis supported by solid evidence drawn from the student's research, the mechanics of in-text citations, a bibliography in the format dictated by the class' discipline, and the whole communicated with effective organization, formatting, syntax, and spelling.
- A Community Service Log Sheet and/or letters of commendation, verifying at least 60 hours served, from your community service supervisor(s).

For each item, the student completes a Portfolio Item Reflection Sheet or writes a paragraph explaining why the item has been included for the chosen skill. A definition of each skill, in the student's own words, is highly recommended. These summaries are instrumental during the portfolio preparation and review process.

Additional copies of the Portfolio Item Reflection Sheet, Community Service Log Sheet, and Essential Skill Conference Worksheet are located in the Media Center and can also be obtained from an advisor.

Junior Portfolio Essential Skills Evaluation Rubric

Students must have at least one item demonstrating their achievement for each Essential Skill. At the Freshman or Sophomore Portfolio Conferences and the Junior Portfolio Defense, the assembled parties will evaluate each skill as one of the following:

Missing / Fails: None or no appropriate items. The student has little to no understanding of the skill.

Approaches: The student demonstrates awareness of what the skill means, has understanding of what the skill entails, and can provide a reasonable example. This is acceptable for Freshmen and first-year ESOL students.

Meets: The student demonstrates understanding and use of the skill according to the provided rubric. Juniors must meet the standard in order to pass!

Advanced: The student demonstrates deeper cognitive understanding, and discusses several appropriate items that indicate college level mastery of this skill.

Below is a rubric for what the faculty generally regards as passing for each Essential Skill (note that for purposes of simplicity all pronouns are feminine, but are intended as gender-neutral):

Acting in the benefit of the community

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of recognizing that she is a part of a community and/or communities, understanding the needs of the community, deciding how she can help fulfill the needs of the community, making compromises if the needs of the community are different than her own, and seeing her actions through to the end. Although it is not required merely for this skill, the student must demonstrate at least 60 hours of verified community service.

Thinking and acting ethically

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of recognizing others and the community, considering and understanding actions before she acts, perceiving positive and negative consequences for herself, others, the community, and the environment for all actions, and accepting and dealing with consequences.

Working collaboratively

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of listening and responding appropriately, constructing and following group/class guidelines, following group/class guidelines, and contributing meaningfully to the goals of the group/class.

Communicating effectively

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of understanding a subject and/or concept, conceptualizing or outlining the subject and/or concept, translating it into an appropriate meaningful visual, oral, written, physical, or musical form, and verifying effectivity of communication through some form of feedback.

Working creatively

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of recognizing habits and methods of herself and others in the field of study and creative community, understanding the purpose of the habits of methods of herself and others, experimenting with different materials, concepts and purposes in relation to the context of those habits and methods, and designing new methods by combining elements from different habits and methods. The student shows that she is capable of self-reflection with growing awareness of identity, emotions, and choices, as well as soliciting, selecting, and processing feedback instrumental to the developmental process.

Solving problems

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of recognizing the opportunity to solve problems, defining and/or formulating the problem or question, brainstorming possible solutions, testing and evaluating solutions, and verifying the process.

Persisting in achieving quality

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of identifying quality work, integrating feedback appropriately, and redoing and/or reworking projects, assignments, papers, experiments, etc. to achieve the best possible quality.

Applying effective research methods

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of finding information, formulating questions, collecting and organizing appropriate information, assessing information, and presenting information in a meaningful form. (Although not necessarily required for this skill, at least one research paper must be included somewhere in the portfolio that demonstrates mastery of research skills, a reasonable thesis supported by solid evidence, good organization and writing, and clear connections to research through appropriately formatted in-text and bibliographic citations.)

Managing materials and time to accomplish goals

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of managing materials and time to accomplish goals by identifying and organizing sub-tasks of projects, determining materials needed for each sub-task, setting a realistic plan and timeline, and sticking to the plan and timeline. (Note that a portfolio that is not completed by the 1st quarter of the senior year calls this skill into question again.)

Working independently

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of completing assignments, being prepared for tasks, working without supervision, making choices and assessing her progress toward stated goals.

Appreciating and understanding different perspectives

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she is capable of suspending her judgment, opening her mind and receiving the whole perspective, putting herself in another person's shoes, arguing the other person's perspective, evaluating the perspective's authenticity, and responding to the evaluation ethically.

Making connections and being aware of context

During the explanation of her portfolio items, the student has shown that she recognizes the importance of what she already knows, can look at the subject in relationship to its context, can recognize similarities between what she knows and new information learned, and is capable of making connections that shows she is aware of the context.

Essential Skill Reflection Questions

This list of questions is hardly exhaustive; come up with more! Such questions are meant to provoke reflection on the meaning of each Essential Skill for the individual, as well as facilitate deeper discussion of the skills in advisory meetings and quarterly review sessions.

Acting in the benefit of the community

- How does the community determine what it wants/needs?
- How do community members know what benefits/what doesn't benefit the community?
- What are some examples of acting in the benefit of the community?

Thinking and acting ethically

- What are ethics?
- What kinds of situations often involve difficult choices?
- If a choice between "right" and "wrong" is obvious, is it still an ethical choice?
- How do you justify your action of _____ as ethical?

Working collaboratively

- Is all group work collaborative?
- Were there disagreements? If so, how did you solve them?
- How did you work together?
- How would the project have been different if you hadn't been there?

Communicating effectively

- What are the different ways of communicating?
- How do you know if your communication was effective?
- What are the roles of listening and feedback in communication?
- Why is it important to identify your audience before you begin to communicate?

Working creatively

- Why/How is _____ creative?
- Did you have something specific in mind?
- What would you do to be more creative?
- What material/process did you use?
- Could you have done it differently?

Solving problems

- How do you identify when something is a problem?
- What is the process of solving a problem?
- What are some life problems you have had to solve?

Persisting in achieving quality

- How do you decide when something is “good work”?
- How do you decide when you are done?
- Is there anything more that you want to do to make it better?
- Did someone push you, or did you push yourself to perfect it?

Applying effective research methods

- How did you know where to look for information?
- How do you know if the information is valid?
- Is the date of the information relevant for your needs?
- Is the information impartial, or does it seem to have a bias? If so, what?
- Do you understand all of the information? What parts are most applicable?

Managing materials and time to accomplish goals

- Do you see a link between your ability to stay organized and your level of interest in a goal?
- What keeps you organized in the areas where you are organized?
- What does “manage” mean?
- Are you allowed to ask for help?

Working independently

- Do you ever work independently just because you want to do it yourself?
- Does “independently” mean only by yourself?
- When did you realize you could accomplish _____ yourself? Is this a new realization?
- When you realize you need help, how do you decide exactly what you need?

Appreciating and understanding different perspectives

- What different perspectives have you encountered lately?
- What event or line of thought changed your perspective on _____?
- Have you ever had an assignment that challenged you to rethink a perspective?

Making connections and being aware of context

- How do you process a new piece of information?
- What does it mean to put something in its context?
- Why is the context important?
- What kinds of connections do you make with new information?
- How do you remember information?

Portfolio Item Reflection Sheet

Name _____ Date _____

Item _____

Source _____ Grade Level _____

Check an Essential Skill that is reflected in this item:

<input type="checkbox"/> Acting in the benefit of the community	<input type="checkbox"/> Persisting in achieving quality
<input type="checkbox"/> Thinking and acting ethically	<input type="checkbox"/> Applying effective research methods
<input type="checkbox"/> Working collaboratively	<input type="checkbox"/> Managing materials and time to accomplish goals
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicating effectively	<input type="checkbox"/> Working independently
<input type="checkbox"/> Working creatively	<input type="checkbox"/> Appreciating and understanding different perspectives
<input type="checkbox"/> Solving problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Making connections and being aware of context

How is this Essential Skill reflected in this portfolio item?

Why did you choose this item for your portfolio?

Junior Portfolio Conference Preparation - Essential Skills Worksheet (1 per skill)

Skill: _____

Definition of the skill in your own words (i.e., what does this mean to you?)

Use. How do you/could you use this skill in school, at home, and in the community?

Proof! (Back it up with specific physical items that demonstrate understanding, use, and growing mastery of this skill.) Besides documents of various kinds, items can consist of photos, art work, certifications, videos, PowerPoint slides or copies, recordings, programs, or some other form of tangible evidence that you can share with us at the conference.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Community Service Log Sheet

Take this sheet with you to your volunteer assignment and have it filled out each time you work.

Name: _____ Sheet _____ of _____

Organization: _____

Date	Number of hours worked	Duties performed	Supervisor Comments and signature/initials*	Student Comments (use another sheet if needed)

Total hours in this sheet = _____

*If In-School service, must be initialed by supervising teacher and/or HS Director