

# End of Semester Portfolios

1. Locate these writings:
  - a. This I Believe essay
  - b. I am From poem
  - c. Interview (either the interview you completed for your compare/contrast essay OR the interview you completed of your classmate)
  - d. Compare/Contrast essay about Ogallala
  - e. Expository essay
  - f. Two of your favorite journal entries (type these up)
2. Begin editing/revising--look for grammatical errors and other obvious errors (wrong choice of words, no introductions, etc). Use the track changes function to complete this step.
3. Choose ONE essay (not a poem) to REVISE for the 6 Traits of Writing. This essay will be worth 100 points. Place a sticky note on this essay so I know which one is perfected. This essay is due \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Place them in the order listed above.
5. Look through your essays and notice the progress you have made! Complete a learning letter (see handout for an explanation) and place this at the beginning of your portfolio.
6. Decorate your portfolio--make it unique!
7. Turn in by \_\_\_\_\_!

# Learning Letters

The reflective letter should explain the following: what is in the portfolio, including information about the different selections; an assessment of the author's growth during the year and possibly previous years; an explanation of the author's process for different types of writing (outlines, rough drafts, group editing, revising); and an explanation of what your favorite work in the classroom was and why. We have also worked in cooperative learning groups throughout this semester; discuss how working in these groups has helped you in this class. The reflective letter should comment on specific examples included in the portfolio and will count as a significant part of the final grade. The reflective letter is both introspective and creative. Feel free to address the reader directly, use first person to discuss your writing, and take chances with style and organization. Have fun, but stay focused.

Dearest Mrs. Helzer,

When I started in your class, I wasn't sure what to think because you were one of the "new teachers on the block." I wasn't sure what to expect and I was in the class with an old friend from middle school, a new friend from band, and a kid at my church who's pretty cool, so I decided that a year in the class couldn't hurt me too much. As the first semester passed, I came to enjoy it, if not for the work, for the environment, for the experience, and for the people.

Before, my writing was just something I did, an assignment given to us, I looked at it, and I did it, get it back, an A, what else? It was never particularly good; even in our 8th grade English class, we were given a format to write in, five paragraphs, three supports for each topic sentence, conclude with something clever or cute. As I moved into your class, I finally had to deal with my mediocre writing, especially now that my teachers recognize it too. How can I say that differently? What's the word for it? I know it could be better, but... I'll fix it later, maybe? What do I ask to get help besides "Fix this"? In my author's notes, I learned that I could take the issues that I am facing with my writing and spell out those weaknesses for myself and for the assignment. The author's notes really gave me a chance to reflect on my writing and think about what I needed help with on that particular assignment. These then directed our group time during peer-editing days. This brings me to my next point: cooperative learning groups. I liked that we got a chance to work with different people, but I didn't always enjoy this because there are some

people I'd rather not work with. And yes, I know that later in my life there will be people I have to work with who I don't enjoy working with, but I'd rather deal with that later. Working with other people did help me to become interdependent and it taught me to be a better communicator. I realized that when it was time to receive feedback from my group on my writing, I wanted specific feedback. I wanted people to tell me what they liked and what I needed to fix. Because of this, I tried my hardest to give very specific feedback. Sometimes it was hard because the person's paper was too awful to even point out what was good about the paper and then there wasn't enough time to really help this person fix his/her essay. Other times giving feedback was hard because some people don't seem to want feedback on their writing. These people tend to think their writing is perfect when it's really not, so that was hard. Overall, I enjoyed the group time and it helped me to make my writing better. It was also nice to have a chance to socialize :)

Academic writing pieces have always been my least favorite, though most frequent, assignments, and this was where I first came to decide that I should face my weaknesses in writing, soon, before my grade suffered too much. As I browse through my old folders unsuccessfully trying to recall my earliest works in high school, I see my folders "last modified 12/1/2004 5:15 AM." Ahh, the joys of my long, first semester in high school. Somewhere in there is my first disappointing look at the mediocrity in myself. In this portfolio, my expository essay is a classic example of how I write. Reading through it, it is a good essay, but nothing else. My opening is interesting, but not as effective as I wished it to be. My subject was the musician Janis Joplin--her life, her music career, and her legacy, but I did not establish that too well: that's what I talked about, but I didn't give many specifics, I was really vague in my writing. Problems like these are what hold me back in writing; these are the problems that I see.

The next essay, my compare and contrast essay about Ogallala, is not my favorite piece. I liked thinking about our community, but I didn't like the compare/contrast format. I had a hard time structuring this essay and wasn't quite sure how to set up my paragraphs. I had plenty of information, but I just didn't know how to arrange the details. This is reflected in my grade. I did not do very well on this essay. But, I think could go back and perfect this essay. Using the paragraph construction worksheets from our expository essays on this compare/contrast essay would help me. I liked that worksheet because it gave me a form to follow.

Another essay included in this portfolio is my This I Believe essay. It started off as rambling and turned into another essay that could have been better. Only this time, the subject was something I cared at least a little bit about and could write from what I wanted to. Though what I got back from you on the essay was disappointing but not unexpected, the comment on the first page about the story being unclear made me think. You said that you could see where I was trying to go with this, but it didn't make sense. It bothered me a little at first, but thinking back, it's just a reminder of some of the incompetence in my writing, where I was unable to show the reader what I was trying to say. Or maybe I misinterpreted your comment, but either way, the essay could have turned out better; maybe I'll revise it for future use.

The next entries in my portfolio are my favorite journal entries. This year you gave us each a journal and told us that we would be writing for the first ten minutes of class each day. When you told me this, I thought you were NUTS. I hate writing, so I was NOT looking forward to this portion of class. But as the semester progressed I began to enjoy our daily writing time (don't tell anyone!). It helped me to clear my mind. I liked that we could listen to music during this time because I always listen to music while I work--it helps me focus. In the first journal entry included, I talk about my music teachers and reveal the weird aura from the OHS music department. It's not much to see, or maybe it's a bit of the low-down on your colleagues. The second entry is a response to one of the "Making a Difference" video segments. I liked watching these because they inspire me to make a difference. It reminds me of the importance of thinking of others above myself. The prompts this year have been interesting, and I got a bit out of some of them. As a whole, I think the ones I chose for this portfolio are a good reflection of not only what levels of understanding we have applied in completing the prompts but also a good insight to me and my personality.

The remaining entries are an interview that I completed on one of my classmates and my I am From poem. The interview we did helped me in many ways. First, it allowed me to get to know one of my classmates better. I knew this person, but I learned a lot about her. For example, I never knew that she had a scar on her left knee from being thrown off a merry-go-round. I also didn't know that her favorite food is spaghetti--she told me that she could eat spaghetti for every meal! The I am From poem was probably my favorite writing assignment this semester. I always

thought that poems had to rhyme, and I really don't like rhyming poems. I think they sound cheesy, so I was thankful when you told us that it didn't have to rhyme! This also gave me a chance to think about what makes me who I am. In this poem I wrote about my hometown, my grandparents' old cabin, the food I ate as a child, and things my parents taught me. I also wrote about what I hope to do with the rest of my life. It was a nice way to reflect on my life.

I'm glad that you did not put a limit on words for this letter, but I also feel bad thinking of the vast amounts of papers you have to look over before school is out, but alas, you never listen when I advise you to stop assigning us so much work, so there is no more I can do. As I conclude this letter, it is my hope that what I see now as the conclusion will not equal the volume of the earlier parts of this letter. I sat down to write it, keeping in mind what the requirements were, but essentially, I just wrote, as I normally do for any piece of writing I do, whether it be reflective letter, academic essay, or writing prompt, and as I normally do, I began too late before the due date to accomplish much in my writing. The only time I ever pre-write is when I am forced to or when there is a time limit with much to say and no time to edit. Free-response questions in History are the only pieces of writing that I have ever chosen to plan before I dive, but even then, it is crunch-time: my time is limited, and my brain-power is depleting as every minute passes.

This whole letter has felt to me like an explanation of how my writing is weak and unclear, and though I may have improved, now that I am more aware of how I write, but I do not feel like much has changed in the past two years. In this letter I make note of this, but I do not say much on what I enjoy writing. I guess this is because I have yet to discover enough forms of writing to know what I like best. Writing has always scared me a bit because we can never take back our words, but they can be forgotten – when written down, someone can always go back and remind him/herself, and that can be bad. But I did not mind writing this too much, besides it being too late in the year and too late at night for it. I guess reflective writing is what I enjoy most, which makes sense because it connects with the kind of person I am.

I apologize for my four pages of emptiness, and I thank you for what you have given me this past semester. If my writing never improves, it will be of my own fault, but if I overcome my writing obstacles and clear up my thoughts and my writing, my deepest thanks go out to you. If I disappear in the next three years or especially after I graduate from this deep and endless pit of

doom, OHS for short, you can remember my friends and I from the color we paint your house.  
By the way, the weekend is closing in and we'll need your choice on a color soon.

Deepest thanks,

Jane Doe

Darn, I was hoping I would finish before midnight...

# Portfolio Rubric

**Learning letter \_\_\_\_\_/25 points**

- The letter is open, honest, and reflective
- The letter is a true statement of what the student has learned throughout the semester
- Errors in mechanics are not noticeable or distracting
- The student has obviously spent a good deal of time composing this letter

**This I Believe essay \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Edits are evident (track changes)

**I am From poem \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Edits are evident (track changes)

**Interview \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Typed up and in question and answer form

**Compare/Contrast essay about Ogallala \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Edits are evident (track changes)

**Expository essay \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Edits are evident (track changes)

**Two of your favorite journal entries \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Entries are typed and dated

**Aesthetic value \_\_\_\_\_/5 points**

- Cover of portfolio is decorated and unique

**Total \_\_\_\_\_/60 points**