# Engineering Communication Language Portfolio – Facilitator's Manual

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# 1.Introduction

The Engineering Communication Language Portfolio (ECLP) is designed specifically for internationally educated engineers. It is intended to complement a communication class that makes use of authentic workplace engineering activities.

The facilitator's manual provides background information and guidance on using the language portfolio in an English as an Additional Language (EAL) classroom.

The language portfolio encourages learners to reflect on the learning process itself, identifying their current language ability, immediate learning goals and preferred learning styles. This type of reflection fosters learner autonomy and improves motivation.

The ECLP is based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), and developed out of the study *Benchmarking the Language Demands of the Engineering Profession in Alberta* (Watt & Cervatiuc, 2007). In that study, a number of workplace engineering tasks were analyzed and benchmarked against the CLB levels required to perform them effectively. Based on an average of engineering workplace tasks, CLB Level 8 was recommended for immigrants in order to function effectively at a professional level as engineers. This is in line with benchmark levels adopted elsewhere, for example in the Engineering Communication Language Assessment Battery (ECLAB) currently being developed by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks on behalf of Engineers Canada.

In practice, not all Internationally Educated Engineering Professionals (IEEPs) will work at full professional engineer level. Others may have enough language skills to get engineering or technologist jobs but later find that language limitations restrict their ability either to keep those jobs or to gain promotions. In order to handle routine day-to-day technologist tasks or to benefit from language training grounded in an engineering workplace context, Internationally Educated Engineering Professionals (IEEPs) need to have reached at least CLB level 6 in all skills.

This facilitator's manual provides an overall conceptual framework and specific guidance on how the ECLP can be implemented. It is not in itself a curriculum, but rather offers suggestions for best practice.  Teachers will need to decide the best way to apply the portfolio to their particular classrooms. The portfolio can be used with a wide variety of teaching approaches and can be applied to any engineering communication class along with any textbook.

Research at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) led to the production of an Engineering Language Portfolio Curriculum Framework which identifies 22 key engineering workplace communication tasks (divided into 38 subtasks) based on literature searches and focus group discussions with engineers. This framework is available as a separate document. A set of engineering workplace scenarios based on the 38 key tasks

together with accompanying classroom materials is currently being developed. These may be useful to instructors, though it is emphasized that the portfolio can be used with any engineering-focused language curriculum.

# 2. Canadian Language Benchmarks

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) set the national standard for people who are learning English or French as an additional language in Canada. The focus is on the language a learner will need in order to live and work in the Canadian environment. Language competencies are described over three stages (beginner, intermediate and advanced), each of which is divided into four sub-stages, for a total of twelve levels. Each level looks at performance in four different skill areas – listening, speaking, reading and writing. The CLB is built on the assumption that as the levels increase

1. communication tasks become progressively more difficult
2. communication content becomes progressively more demanding
3. expectations of the effectiveness of communication and the quality of communication rise

(based on Pawlikowska-Smith 2005 p. xi)

Global Performance Descriptors provide a general picture of a learner's performance at each CLB level. They are accompanied by Performance Conditions, which are the parameters within which learners demonstrate their language ability.  In addition to the global descriptors, detailed "Can- do" statements describe specific competencies in speaking, listening, reading and writing at each CLB level.

Although there are 12 Benchmarks in total, ranging from basic to advanced proficiency, the Engineering Communication Language Portfolio focuses specifically on the intermediate Benchmarks 6, 7 and 8.  This is the key proficiency level for most overseas-educated engineers who need to get and maintain employment in Canada. CLB 5-6 is an entrance requirement for labour market level language training in many provinces, including Alberta, whereas CLB 8 in all four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) will allow many individuals to function successfully in an entry-level professional engineering position (Watt & Cervatiuc, 2007).

As a starting point for self-assessment or for final appraisal of learners' language proficiency, the ECLP includes a condensed CLB grid for levels 5-9 (target and surrounding levels). Taken together with the general can-do statements from the CLB website (www.language.ca), this grid gives learners a good overview of what they can realistically expect to do at the level of language proficiency indicated by their CLBA or CLBPT test scores.

In order for learners and teachers to set specific study targets, a more detailed engineering-related framework of descriptors is needed. This is available in the Engineering Communication Language Curriculum Outline and Assessment Framework, a custom set of can-do descriptors that represent key engineering workplace tasks at the target CLB levels 6, 7 and 8.

Learners can use these descriptors to gauge their understanding of the communication requirements of a Canadian engineering workplace and assess their occupation-specific language proficiency. Students can then select the tasks they need to work on and set goals for a course or for self-study. In addition, they can use the can-do criteria to help select pieces of work to put in the dossier section of the portfolio.  These samples of work will serve as evidence to demonstrate learners' achievement of a particular CLB level or their mastery of particular learning goals.  For teachers, these statements can serve as learning objectives for structuring a course that is referenced to the CLB, or when planning a task-based unit. Although the descriptors are work related, they are still fairly general and will need to be further broken down into subtasks and more specific linguistic competencies for the purposes of lesson planning and assessment.

# 3. The Engineering Communication Language Portfolio

The word "portfolio" suggests a folder containing polished samples of a person's work, for example an artist's portfolio of drawings or a model's portfolio of photographs. This presentation function is one aspect of the Engineering Communication Language Portfolio (ECLP). Samples of work that display a learner's language ability may be put alongside a résumé and/or a CV, copies of certificates, references, etc. This "reporting" aspect of the portfolio is probably the easiest to explain to students.

However, there is another side to the ECLP, a learning portfolio. This allows students to establish where they are at the beginning of the program, set realistic learning goals and measure their progress against these goals. During this process they will collect samples of work that show their progress and compare potential samples against evaluation criteria in order to select appropriate illustrations of their achievements. Beyond being merely a collection of samples of work, the learning portfolio improves learners' motivation by giving them insight into their learning, control over the learning process and responsibility for learning outcomes. This learning aspect of the portfolio process lays the foundation for lifelong autonomous learning.

The idea of a comprehensive portfolio as a tool for learners, teachers, and employers was developed in the European Language Portfolio (ELP),which is widely used in Europe and beyond and which served as a model  for the present Engineering Communication

Language Portfolio. Because of its flexible structure and dual reporting/learning function, the ELP can be used with most types of language curricula and with a variety of audiences. Although the ECLP targets a more specific audience (newcomer engineers in Canada vs. all language learners for the ELP) and is based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks, as opposed to the Common European Framework for the ELP, the ECLP fulfils essentially the same functions as its European counterpart. In our experience, portfolio-based learning, centered around the ECLP, has the potential to:

- Promote autonomous learning in and outside the classroom. Learner autonomy includes actively involving students in instructional decisions, holding them responsible for planning and managing their learning and encouraging them to reflect on the learning process and on learning outcomes.
- Improve students' self-assessment skills, or their ability to (1) assess their base level  and progress in the course in relation towards their short-  medium-   and long-term goals and identify areas for improvement (2) assess their  communicative and linguistic proficiency in relation to CLB and to specific engineering tasks.
- Increase students' metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness. Metacognitive awareness may be defined as the ability to recognize one's own learning styles, preferences and strategies and evaluate their effectiveness. Metalinguistic (metacommunicative ) awareness refers to understanding of the linguistic structures and skills required to complete specific tasks as well as of one's strengths and weaknesses in communication.
- Enhance learners' self-confidence in their ability to succeed in a Canadian workplace through the development of new skills increased awareness of their strengths and improved cultural sensitivity in communication.
- Develop vital career and cultural awareness skills in a specific professional context. For example, for engineers, lifelong learning skills, goal setting and learner autonomy can be discussed together with the general principles of project management, teamwork or workplace culture (adapting skills, learning about new culture, study at college or university, job search and employment). Moreover, parts of the ECLP (especially, the passport and dossier) can be transferred to a presentation portfolio for interviews and employment.
- Make the learning process more transparent for students and teachers by tracking the development of skills and language competency and by basing outcomes on a commonly accepted standard (CLB). Similarly, working with the portfolio increases learners' and teachers' ability to relate course materials to target outcomes and to the CLB scale.

*As with the European Language Portfolio, the ECLP is made up of three sections that are associated with the functions mentioned above: Language Biography, Language Dossier and Language Passport. Depending on the structure of their curriculum, teachers may wish to use one or more of these ECLP sections at various stages in their courses.*

### 1. Language Biography

The Biography is the main classroom management tool that guides the learner through focused diagnostic assessment, goal-setting, and reflective learning and evaluation process with the help of the following templates:

- Background reflection: learning or working with engineering-specific English in the past
- General CLB scale
- Engineering-specific Can-do descriptors for the most common workplace tasks
- Learning style questionnaire
- Goal-setting templates for the course and for specific units or activities filled in before and after each module
- Learning Journal
- Unit-specific planning, reflection, self-and-peer assessment templates
- Final reflection

The present model reflects the fact that the ECLP was originally developed for use in EMCN's Engineers and Technologists Integration Program (ETIP). Teachers may need to adapt the templates to the needs of their particular syllabus. Moreover, it may be necessary to add further reflection or self-assessment forms for speaking and listening (which have not yet been developed for ETIP) as well as to break down the general engineering-specific descriptors into more task-specific Can-do statements that learners and teachers can use for assessment purposes.

Each template in this part may need to be divided into several assignments or classroom activities, in order to allow for teachers' explanations and/or demonstration, individual reflection, students' filling in templates, and discussion in pair, group or whole-class mode. Learners from some cultures may feel reluctant to talk about their background or future plans in public, so a teacher should ask learners about their preferred mode of working and, if necessary, go over the templates on a one-on-one basis.

The suggested order of activities flows from general (e.g. goals for the course) to more specific (e.g. goals for the unit). The activities will encourage learners to explore their past learning experiences, assess their own strengths and weaknesses, set goals, collect evidence of progress or achievement, incorporate feedback from self-or peer assessment and, finally, reflect on the learning process itself. Most of this work will be recorded in the Biography section of the portfolio, with suitable pieces of evidence being compiled in the Dossier.

Many students have the expectation that teachers will set learning goals and measure progress and may show some resistance when asked to engage in these activities themselves; moreover some activities, such as giving a peer a negative rating, can be considered offensive in some cultures. Therefore teachers will probably need to spend a considerable amount of time explaining the purpose of the activities and how to complete them.

## 2. Language Dossier

The Dossier, or purposeful collection of representative samples of students' language skills, best fits the concept of a traditional portfolio. Although such dossiers are often intended for presentation of learners' best work for employment or academic purposes, they may also focus on showing improvement over time, rather than only on demonstrating achievement of a particular standard. In fact, from a teaching perspective, the collecting of material over time plays an important part in the learning process. Selecting samples of work to show one's ability requires learners to work on reflection and self-assessment skills. Furthermore, measuring progress against a standardized measure, such as CLB, helps to develop metalinguistic awareness and ultimately fosters learners' confidence in their ability to perform a given task, not only in the classroom, but also in the real world. This in turn develops learners' confidence in their ability to learn new skills and improves motivation in the classroom.

To accommodate both reporting and learning functions, the ECLP may usefully be divided into a "Working Dossier", where learners store all documentation relating to a specific task or study unit, and a "Presentation Dossier" that will include learners' final samples of work and a rationale for their selection, as well as other templates included in the current ECLP model. In both cases the contents of the dossier should be tied to curriculum objectives and discussed with learners. For example, if learners intend to include materials from a course in their employment portfolio, teachers and/or employment counsellors may need to assist them in selecting the materials.

Although some learners would prefer to start working on their Presentation Dossier at the end of the course, teachers should encourage them to work throughout the program on compiling a master collection of work samples that illustrates as many engineering-specific descriptors from the Biography as possible. This will provide a good pool of material from which final presentation examples can be selected and indeed allow the compilation of different portfolios for different purposes.

In the Working Dossier, learners are expected to use working drafts, final versions of assignments (and, where available, level exemplars) to reflect on whether they have met their learning goals and identify areas where they can improve.  This reflection process may focus on documenting why a certain piece was selected, or on comparing earlier with later versions to show improvement.  After the unit or task has been completed, learners can select the final samples of work that match their goals and/or prove the attainment of a particular skill and complete the supporting rationale statement. They may file away or discard the remaining contents of the Working Dossier to make room for a new unit. Intermediate reflection assignments and learning notes will be useful at the end of the course, when learners may be asked to compile a course-specific version of the presentation dossier and describe how it represents their new language skills and their learning process.

## 3. Language Passport

The Passport summarizes the owner's general and occupation-specific language skills by briefly listing

- his/her CLB level in all four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing),
- language proficiency certificates
- formal and informal experience with engineering-specific English and North American workplace culture in various contexts.

The present templates can be complemented by general Can-do statements from the CLB website or, for a specific course, a list of relevant assignments completed and skills mastered, where appropriate confirmed by a teacher's signature. The Passport comes last in the ECLP model, because it does not lend itself to frequent classroom use. It may be incorporated into an employment portfolio as a brief summary of users' communication competence and supplemented by relevant materials from the Dossier.

# 4.Planning for the portfolio: what teachers should know

1. **Every portfolio is unique, as is every classroom.**
   As an authentic form of assessment, the portfolio should be tailored to every situation. The present document is not a portfolio curriculum, but rather a set of guidelines that can help in planning a portfolio to fit a specific course, audience and teaching style.

**2.The ECLP has been shown to work best in a learner-centered classroom.**
The portfolio as an alternative assessment and learning mode emphasizes learning as a dialogue, co-constructed by learners and their teachers. The ultimate aim of portfolio–based activities in this context is to *empower* learners to take responsibility for the learning process by setting their own goals, and managing and reflecting on their learning.  Consequently, the teacher's role is transformed from a traditional lecturer into a coach and facilitator, accommodating individual learning styles and preferences.  As such, teachers will find it helpful to:
  o  Prepare students to be autonomous learners by providing them with explicit instruction in learning strategies, goal-setting, reflection, and self-assessment skills. If possible, these explanations should be illustrated by real-life examples
  o  Explain the rationale, goals and assessment criteria for every unit or activity and put these in a context that is relevant to students (e.g. employment)
  o  Give students the freedom to choose classroom activities, topics and resources. As an example, "directed study time", where students work on language areas individually, could be introduced into courses, Potentially, students can be asked to prepare their own activities and share them with the class
  o  Provide students with individual help and feedback on their progress. This can be done during the directed study period, as well as general classroom time, if teachers have time to review students' learning goals beforehand
  o  Utilize different strategies in activities to accommodate a variety of learning styles
  o  Encourage pair and group work, peer-assessment and classroom opinions.
  o  Solicit feedback from students on the effectiveness of activities: incorporate appropriate questions into their reflective assignments.


**3.The ECLP and related learning concepts require thorough explanation.**
Whereas most newcomer engineers are familiar with the idea of lifelong learning, they may come from high power-distance cultures where an authority figure (teacher or manager) is ultimately responsible for providing instructions, making decisions and solving workplace conflicts.  To facilitate the "buy-in" of such participants, the processes of autonomous goal-setting, reflection, self-and peer assessment (as practiced with the portfolio) should be presented as a fundamental

cultural component of a Canadian workplace and post-secondary environment and hence be emphasized in teaching.

4. **The ECLP requires careful planning and implementation.**
   It is certainly advisable to allocate classroom time to explain portfolio-based learning to students. If an instructor is not familiar with portfolios, he or she may want to use the ECLP with a component of the course (e.g. writing and teamwork) or introduce it over a long time period (e.g. introductory activities may take from two weeks to two months, depending on the intensity of portfolio use). The key to successful portfolio integration seems to be its *regular, consistent use* (Linguafolio Indiana). The Indiana Department of Education, which piloted a portfolio model into their languages curriculum, suggested the following ideas:

   - Self-directed, once-a-week time periods for students to update and record their progress.
   - Periodic time fillers, when there is an extra 10 minutes, students could update and record their progress.
   - Frequent out of class assignments where students could be asked to update and record their progress.
   - Portfolio contents and student progress can be assessed formally, with the help of portfolio rubrics (to motivate less autonomous students), or informally, in student-teacher conferences (Genesee 1995).
   - End of the course: students review everything they have recorded in order to reaffirm their progress as well as completing a final reflection essay.
   **(Linguafolio Indiana, p. 7)**

   A comprehensive overview of planning the use of a language portfolio is available on the website of the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC) and in the Council of Europe's manual "Preparing teachers to use the European Language Portfolio – arguments, materials and resources" (2007).. Some topics that call for reflection and consideration on the part of the teacher include:

   - **Teaching with the portfolio:** What is your own experience with portfolios? How confident would you be in carrying out portfolio-related activities? (An online questionnaire developed by the NRLRC can help you assess your own readiness.)
   - **Integrating the portfolio with the existing course:** How can each part of the ECLP be used in your course? Can you match any activities in your syllabus and/or textbook with the 38 subtasks listed in the engineering – specific Can-do grid? Among the existing syllabus, textbook and ECLP, which one will take priority in guiding your lesson planning?  What course goals and learner outcomes would you like the ECLP to reflect?
   - **Implementing the portfolio:** How are you going to use the portfolio? Will it be a learning diary, diagnostic, formative or summative assessment tool?

What linguistic abilities are you going to cover?  What CLB levels?  To what extent can you focus on metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness? Which kind of evidence for these outcomes would you include in the Dossier?

- **Scheduling the portfolio:** How much time can you allot for planning portfolios? Can you make any changes to instruction and assessment before the semester begins? How much time per week can you schedule for portfolio activities? When are you going to schedule it in? How much time do you have for individual progress review, given the number of students you are going to have? Can you allocate regular class time for this purpose? How much time can you schedule for your own ongoing review of portfolios? For end-of-marking period evaluation? Is it feasible to incorporate portfolio components as graded assignments?

- **Knowing your students:** How familiar are they with portfolios? Are they prepared to take responsibility for their learning?  What are their organizational abilities? What is most common CLB level in the classroom? What are their linguistic abilities? Will they face difficulties in comprehending the portfolio concepts and completing reflective assignments in English? Do they have the necessary computer skills to work on their portfolios online? What student attitudes will facilitate or hinder the use of ECLP?

- **Receiving peer and administration support:** Have any of your colleagues used the portfolio process in a language classroom before? Can they help you in planning or share some activities or completed templates? Can you delegate some of your marking duties to focus more on planning portfolio activities and related lessons? (Note that it is probably inadvisable to plan to introduce other curriculum revisions at the same time as creating new portfolio activities, as implementing a portfolio can be time-consuming.)

# 5. Introductory activities (to be completed in the first 2-4 weeks of the course)

**Activity 1: Setting the background.**

**When:** Preferably following the introduction of workplace communication principles and cultural expectations.

**Purpose:** Learners start thinking about their employability skills, develop confidence in their abilities, increase cultural awareness and notice cultural differences. This should proceed from general to specific—everything from general competencies and tasks to linguistic subskills and assessment criteria (grammar, accuracy).

**Learners' role:** The students fill out worksheets regarding their background: formal study of English – general and for specific purposes, informal experience, and vocational skills, . They reflect and make brief notes on how these personal experiences helped them improve their language and communication skills; if/how these experiences are transferable into the Canadian study/workplace context.

**Teacher's role:** Discuss general principles of Canadian workplace communication and culture before the activity**.** Do not pressure students towards sharing answers, as this may be uncomfortable for some cultures. Instead, ask for volunteers to discuss some of their experiences/ask what was new for them given the previous information.  Encourage students to continue comparing their native context with the Canadian one and note the differences.

### Activity 2: Introduction to Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment.

**When:** During/Following activity 1

**Purpose:**  Raise learners' awareness of their language level.

**Learners' role:**  Verify their official test result with the general descriptors and fill in detailed Can-do statements.

**Teacher's role:**  Introduce students to CLB, and explain the difference between general and occupation specific language proficiency, and linguistic skills and communication skills.

### Activity 3: Goal setting and action plan

**Purpose**: Connect course objectives to students' short and long-term goals, and to help them navigate their learning and set learning goals for the course.

**Teacher's role:** Provide students with overview of the course and criteria for success: Explain rationale for objectives, labour market integration, and study at NAIT.  Discuss reasonable course goals (i.e. progressing along the CLB general scale compared with mastering specific communicative tasks). Ideally, goals should be reviewed with students to ensure that the goals are realistic and are targeting relevant gaps in students' knowledge. Ensure that students can choose activities to work on.

Possible goals include:

- master several objectives of the course (and related tasks)
- for every chapter: specific goals pertaining to different aspects of language proficiency (grammar, vocabulary, discourse etc.)

 Give students quiet lab/class time to contemplate and record their goals.

Possible extension: review the worksheets and use the information to customize instruction.

**Students' role:** Fill in the goal-setting forms, map their plan of action (how certain skills will be learned and practiced, ask students to refer to identified gaps and preferred learning styles and strategies). Ensure that goals are achievable and revise responses on the forms regularly as the course progresses, refer to these responses in reflective assignments.

**Activity 4: Learning preferences and strategies**

**Purpose:** Raise students' and teacher's awareness of their learning styles and preferences; discuss language learning strategies.

**Teacher's role:**

Before the activity:  Discuss learning styles in their relation to culture. After the activity: possibly: interview/group discussion activity on individual preferences, links to study skills expected at NAIT and idea of life-long informal learning and related skills and learning strategies. Also, students should be given the opportunity to work in their preferred manner as much as possible.

**Students' role:** Fill in the questionnaire on learning preferences and include it in the portfolio for the future reference; participate in whole-class or small group discussion.

**Activity 5: Reflection on language learning**

**Purpose:** Raise students' awareness of a personal learning identity; connect course goals with practice opportunities.

**Students' role:** Submit a reflection on some of the following topics (at the discretion of the teacher):

- One's expected role as a student, strengths and weaknesses in learning;
- Preferred classroom activities, based on past experiences: types  of activities, modes (group vs. individual work); materials; interest in selecting their own activities, which kind of corrections they like/dislike etc
- Comparison of the context of learning and work: native country vs. Canada; transferable skills acquired through pre-immigration experience
- Perceived areas needing improvement in language and communication
- One's preferred approach to learning, how it would work for language learning in particular
- Expectations of the teacher (Alternative: what did they liked or disliked about a previous teacher)
- Expectations regarding the course and link to one's goals and perceived areas needing improvement
- Experience with group work and possible areas needing improvement; preferred role in teamwork for this course

**Teacher's role:** Reflection skills and benefits of reflective learning should be made explicit to students before assigning this activity. While correcting, teachers should comment on reflection points and, ideally, individual learning styles should be considered in classroom work and homework distribution.

**Extension:** Separate checklists/reflection grids on how I learn new words/structures/pronunciation/other skills and how I remember/retain information

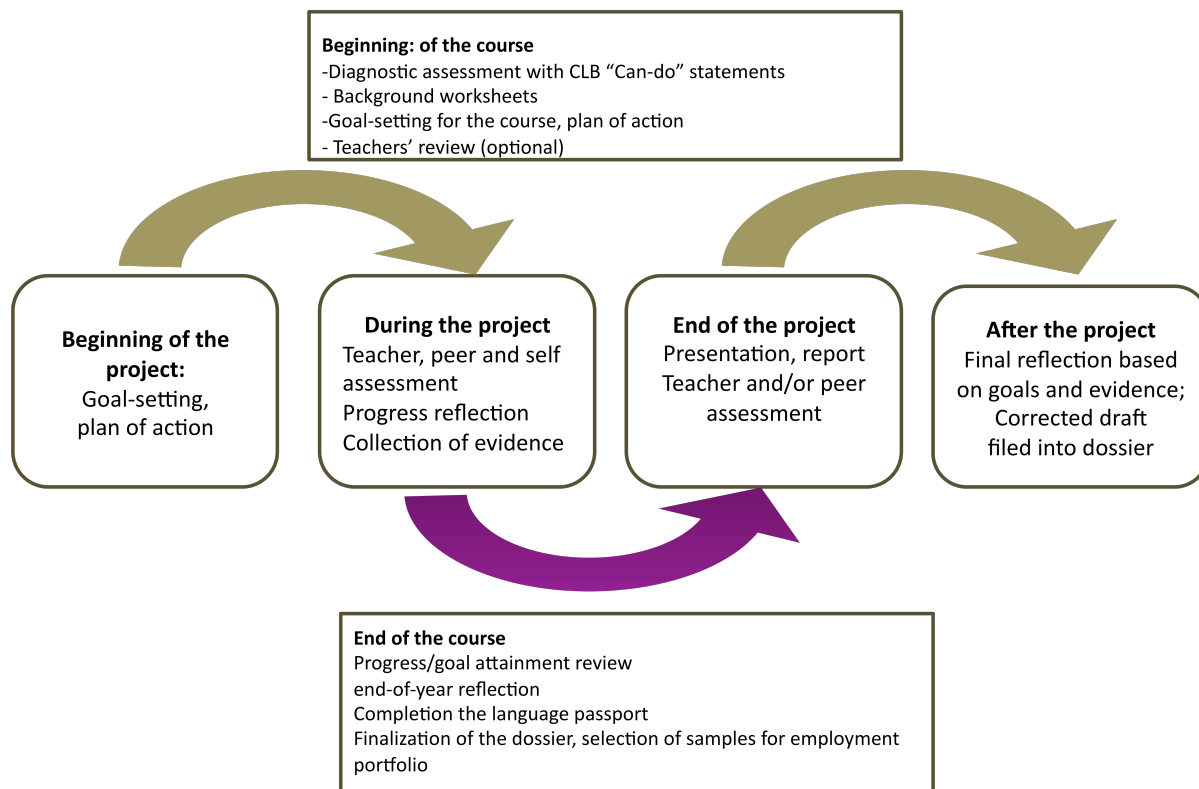# 6. Incorporating portfolio use into the classroom: reflective learning cycle

This cycle can be repeated every two units (writing) or a certain period of time (two weeks to a month for teamwork). The process has several stages:

1. **Setting specific goals**.  For each writing task in the curriculum, activity-specific Can-do statements, when available, can be used to document areas needing improvement. If activity-specific checklists are unavailable, it is advisable to outline the linguistic requirements for successful task completion and discuss assessment criteria with students. In addition, teachers should review student goals, if students request help, and provide them with suggestions.
2. **Collecting material**. While working on a unit, students have the opportunity to work on activities of their choice according to their preferred learning style. They collect materials demonstrating their progress (completed exercises, self-and peer assessments, essay drafts etc.) which they store in the appropriate section of their "Working Dossier".
3. **Selecting representative work samples**.  Concluding a particular unit, students select the best samples of their work and provide an explanation for their choice (these can also serve as a future employment portfolio).  In addition, students can be asked to fill out a reflection form or submit several paragraphs outlining their learning experience.
4. **Reinforcing portfolio use**.  The teacher should consolidate portfolio-based learning throughout the course to ensure learners' understanding. While commenting on students' reflective statements, the teacher should notice recurring difficulties, address them as a class and focus the next set of reflective questions/essays accordingly.  The teacher must remember to respect student confidentiality when discussing reflective statements.

 Schematically, the portfolio process looks as follows ("project" is any significant curriculum segment lasting at least two weeks that ends with a graded assignment):

# Portfolio as a learning tool

**Beginning: of the course**
-Diagnostic assessment with CLB "Can-do" statements
- Background worksheets
-Goal-setting for the course, plan of action
- Teachers' review (optional)

**Beginning of the project:**
Goal-setting,
plan of action

**During the project**
Teacher, peer and self assessment
Progress reflection
Collection of evidence

**End of the project**
Presentation, report
Teacher and/or peer assessment

**After the project**
Final reflection based on goals and evidence;
Corrected draft filed into dossier

**End of the course**
Progress/goal attainment review
end-of-year reflection
Completion the language passport
Finalization of the dossier, selection of samples for employment portfolio

## Suggested approaches to classroom logistics

The National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC) has outlined steps to consider when implementing a portfolio in the classroom. Modified to fit the ECLP, they are as follows:

1. Each learner should have a folder or other container in the classroom where work that might be placed in the portfolio (artifacts) is kept. All artifacts should be dated and include a brief note regarding the context in which the work was done. (Small sticky notes can be helpful in this process). Dating each artifact is essential for tracking progress over time. Putting the work in context will facilitate later annotations to pieces included in the portfolio.

2. Before learners begin to include artifacts, they should organize their portfolio into sections representing each goal. In a writing portfolio, for example, they can do this by using headings, dividers, and labels (see below for a possible section breakdown).

3. Formulate a set of guidelines for choosing portfolio pieces. In general, keep in mind that the work should demonstrate progress toward one of the portfolio goals.  The learner should be proud of the work and want to include it, and the work should be relevant to the learner's life. It is important to note that portfolios assess learning progress. Significant learning occurs on the way to mastering a skill. This progress

can be documented by including work that shows evidence of the steps made toward the goal. Drafts and critical reflections, for example, are both effective. What this means for selecting pieces is that the work only needs to meet the guidelines for inclusion; it does not need to show mastery, but only that progress has been made toward a goal.

5. Approximately every two weeks or at the end of a unit, ask learners to select one or two pieces of evidence to include in their portfolios. The first pieces will become baselines to measure progress. Some pieces can meet more than one goal. The learners, with guidance from the teacher, decide toward which goal the work shows progress. That progress is evidenced by completing a learner annotation form explaining the relevance of the work to the goal. This component of portfolio assessment emphasizes the learner's role in guiding and evaluating their own learning progress. [As the teacher evaluates the learner's work they could mark with sticky notes which assignment best represents the learner's abilities.] If you are using portfolios for the first time, you may want to limit the number of works to be contributed.
(NRCLC 2007)

**Suggested reflection questions; assignments ("project" refers to any task or assignment)**

- What makes this project interesting?
- What part is the most interesting? Difficult?  Strongest? Weakest? Why?
- What did you learn and what skills did you practice while completing this project?
- What assistance and/or resources did you use while completing it?
- How is this project different from other assignments in your portfolio?
- How would you make this project better?
- How did completion of this assignment help you to achieve your final goal?
- Which learning strategies have been most/least helpful?

**Suggested reflection questions: learning styles and strategies (adapted from Gonzalez, 2009)**

- What are your strengths as a student in school?
- What weaknesses (shortcomings) do you have as a student?
- How do you see your role as a language student?
- What are your expectations for the language teacher?
- What aims do you wish to set for this course (week, etc)?
- What are you going to do to reach your aims?
- What aspects of language learning are easy/difficult for you?
- How might you improve your work/ your working habits?
- What is a good group member like in our language class? Why?

- How might you improve your participation in your groups?
- How do you understand (Canadian ways of) communication?
- What elements and skills does language learning include?
- What elements do you find easy/difficult for you? Why?
- What skills are you good at in your language use?
- How can you improve in your language skills?
- How can you strengthen the weaknesses?
- How can teachers and peers help you in your learning?

**Shorter version (also for writing, group or whole-class discussion)**

- What are we learning?
- Why are we learning it?
- How are we learning it?
- How successful is our learning?
- What are we going to do next?

**Suggested questions for the final reflection:**

- What is the value of learning strategies?
- What is the value of goal setting?
- What is the value of reflection and self-assessment?
- What kinds of materials have you included?
- How are the included materials the same/different?
- What does your portfolio reveal about you as a person/engineer/second language student/etc?
- What does your portfolio suggest your strengths are?
- What does your portfolio reveal about how you have changed?
- What do you feel people will learn from your portfolio?
- How do you plan to use your portfolio and reflective writing in the future?

# 7. Example of portfolio use: ETIP writing course

**Objectives:** Activity-specific self-assessment (linguistic, pragmatic) and goal-setting skills, development of learner autonomy and reflective orientations.

**General sequence of activities:**

1. **Background exploration:**  What do students know about a particular task? What are the technical details it should include? Which linguistic and pragmatic features

are important to complete the task successfully and how does it differ in Canada, compared to other cultures?

2. **Criteria for success:** For each activity or task, students have language exemplars as guides: A single exemplar can be developed for each CLB level, or several exemplars for a single CLB level.  The learners will be better prepared to assess their own level if they have the opportunity to discuss the exemplars in groups or rate them collaboratively using the teacher's rubrics (expanded if necessary).

3. **Approaches to task completion and related structures (text organization, grammar, vocabulary): The teacher o**utlines several strategies and has learners reflect on which strategies work best for them.  After explaining everything in detail for several tasks, the teacher may engage learners into drawing a list of communicative tasks and linguistic competencies, determining what they can already do well and selecting specific goals from the improvement areas.

4. **Goal-setting worksheet: The students complete this individually**. The worksheet can include task-specific information, students' notes on what they "Can do", where they want to improve, and particular learning strategies they are going to use.  The objectives and self-assessment should be positively worded. **Extension:** Students can choose activities to complete at their own pace.

5. **Self-assessment and peer-assessment for writing:** The ability to self-assess, such as correction of language errors or critical review of one's learning plans, is a key to developing learner autonomy and building a high-impact portfolio at the end of the course. Following O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), we suggest several preparatory steps to guide learners through their first self-assessment exercises, or exercises covering a culturally sensitive topic:

    i.   Discuss the benefits of student-initiated assessment with your class. Some may consider assessment to be a teacher's duty.  Others may fear they lack the knowledge to carry out a self-assessment . Moreover, a few students may feel it is culturally inappropriate to give others negative feedback. In this situation, it is important that teachers identify these skills as essential in the Canadian workplace (i.e. need for constant self-evaluation and proactive planning, giving feedback in a team etc.).

    ii.  Initiate a class discussion on success criteria for a particular task: Brainstorm student and teacher opinions, explicitly explain the differences and collect students' feedback. Some teachers negotiate assessment criteria explicitly with students, whereas others use similar exercises to highlight differences but prefer to maintain their own criteria.

    iii. Illustrate the assessment criteria with samples of excellent, good and bad work, taken from previous years or created specifically for this purpose. Show the samples to the whole class and initiate discussion on which criteria of good work students can extract and what potential improvements/learning goals for the author can be. Students can also arrange the assessment criteria into charts and store them in their Working Dossiers.  The same

        process can be repeated in small groups in order to engage less confident students and foster collaboration.

    iv.    In the next step, students should work in groups or pairs to rate and/or correct actual work samples from their peers. It is useful for this step to precede self-assessment so that students have more time to understand common assessment criteria before they apply it to their own work.  A sample may be an interim draft of an assignment or a final version, not yet corrected by the teacher. As with any portfolio exercise, teachers should assess level of students' comfort in discussing someone else's strengths and weaknesses and modify the activity if necessary. For example, instead of asking one group to present their peer assessment activity, students can be given a follow-up task to write a reflective response.

6.  **Keeping a Learning Journal:  A learning journal** also represents a form of self-assessment, oriented toward the learning process. Reflecting on the learning process will help learner to keep track of his/her progress and make note of useful experiences. For teachers, such logs present information not only about learners' metacognitive awareness, but also of potential difficulties that need to be addressed with a learner or in class.

7.  **Compiling the dossier**: While working on a writing assignment, learners collect drafts of the assignment, reflection comments, teacher and peer assessments in the Working Dossier. After receiving final comments from teachers and peers, learners file versions of homework assignments, materials they selected and/or created, and their completed action plan as well as a short rationale for selection in their Presentation Dossier.  Possible criteria for selecting material should be discussed with students; alternatively, they can be provided with a checklist.

# 8. Example of portfolio use: ETIP teamwork project

The introduction of a student group project into a curriculum brings another excellent opportunity for  portfolio- based  learning in the classroom. It is a form of experiential learning that, depending on teaching arrangements, may require a substantial degree of autonomy and responsibility on the part of students.  In addition, it helps to present workplace communication and  "transferable" skills in an engineering-related context.

At EMCN, such a workplace oriented-project was specifically added to the ETIP course that encouraged students to practice language and culture-specific teamwork skills (e.g. running meetings, negotiating conflicts, building relationships within a team) in a simulated workplace environment. The task consisted of preparing a contract bid and responding to

proposals for constructing a building.  Each of two classes was split into 4 teams, with 5-6 students in a team:  one team assumed a role of a contractor, responsible for issuing the contract bid and evaluating proposals, and another three teams competed with their proposals and professional presentations in front of the committee. In this activity, students actively participated in determining both the topic (what should be built), task description and assessment criteria for the content (contract bid, specifications for the proposal). The teachers' role was limited to checking students' criteria for appropriateness and feasibility, discussing requirements for presentations, written documents and interim assignments (meetings), whereas students alone were responsible for organizing their time to complete the project and for dealing with teamwork dynamics. Portfolio use and a reflective learning cycle were incorporated into this project as follows:

1.  **Background exploration.** Before the project starts, teachers introduced students to workplace culture and teamwork conventions, and discussed differences between the North American context and countries where students had worked before. Teachers also encouraged students to revisit their biography and anticipate their strong and weak points for such assignments.
2.  **Selecting task description and criteria for assessment.**  Students from the "contractor" group prepared the description of the proposal and submitted it to the teachers within the first week of the projects. After initial correction, the criteria were finalized in a whole class discussion.  In the EMCN teachers' experience, this stage cannot be fully delegated to students, as it is hard to avoid miscommunication related to the terminology and conventions of different engineering fields. Hence, it is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that all students are on the same page in terms of assignment requirements and major deadlines.  Students should also see the rubrics, peer-and self-assessment checklists and other grading tools, so that they know the assessment criteria and the rationale for them beforehand.
3.  **Goal-setting.**  In the next stage, students were asked to write out two types of goals: (1) project goals, or what they plan to achieve together as team, and (2) individual goals, based on their responsibilities in a team and identified areas for improvement. Two different templates are included in the portfolio for this purpose, because they were used in two different types of projects. Following the delegation of responsibilities, students planned their time on their own in a suitable format (e.g. using engineering project management tools).
4.  **Collecting evidence of one's work.**  In addition to required tasks, such as creating meeting agendas and corrected drafts, students should keep other project-related documentation (plans, organization charts, emails, meeting notes) in their Working Dossiers or separate team binders. Apart from providing evidence of teamwork skills for employment portfolio, this type of evidence is useful for tracking individual and team progress.  An important point at this stage is to explain the role of individuals in a team and to encourage students to keep track of their own

achievements in the portfolio as a means of promoting themselves and solving potential conflicts.

5. **Incorporating self and peer assessment.** Project-based learning lends itself perfectly to the  major types of student-driven formative assessment (partially adapted from Little, 2006):

   a. linguistic competence  (grammar, vocabulary , punctuation in writing and presentations)
   b. general written and oral communication skills (public speaking ability, ability to produce logical and coherent texts, ability to handle questions in an appropriate manner)
   c. learning context (how successful one is in achieving one's goals, which strategies worked and did not work, what one would do differently next time)
   d. teamwork skills (i.e. assessing one's contribution to the team)

In our experience, types "b" and "d" may be especially problematic, because they draw on implicit, culture-specific concepts (such as leadership) and patterns of communication. Teachers should plan to spend at least one classroom hour to go through the relevant rubrics and checklists, such as the collaboration rubric and the leadership assessment and presentation skills assessment rubrics in the current portfolio model, explaining the differences on the rating scale and illustrating them with examples.  In addition, they should remind students to be accurate in their peer assessment and use the relevant exercises as an opportunity to practice giving fair feedback.  If possible, teachers should monitor these activities to check students' understanding of the assessment process and give comments to groups and individuals whenever possible.

This activity also presupposes that students are actively involved in summative assessment, in that the "contractor" group rates the proposals and presentations from the content or "engineering" point of view and announces the winning team. Peer assessment of communication skills can also be incorporated into the final presentation, in that a teacher can record all presentations. After the winning team has been selected, but before the final review session with a teacher, students may watch them again and anonymously rate two presentations with the help of rubrics identical to that of a teacher. Teacher should briefly review those comments, to compare them with her own marks and note possible misunderstandings, staple them together and discuss them with the respective teams along with their own marks.

6. **Reflection.**  After the review, students file the final copy of the proposal document into their "Presentation Dossier" along with teachers' and peers' comments and complete a reflection on their learning experience with this project (see the portfolio template and **sample reflection questions above)** for the sample questions.

Teachers do not have to mark these essays or forms; however, they should look for commonly voiced appreciations and concerns to address them with the next project.

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# 10.  Appendix: Teachers' key to the Learning Style Questionnaire (Council of Europe, 2009)


The teacher is recommended to look at the scores for two types of activities. These are:

**a. Activities which are informal, social, open-ended and communicative**. *They tend to appeal to the extrovert, risk-taking learner, for whom the adventure of making inferences in receptive skills and improvising and using strategies in productive skills is an exciting challenge.*

**b. Activities which are formal, individual, highly-structured and linguistically-oriented.** *They tend to appeal to the introvert learner who may feel threatened by the risk of error and likes to internalise vocabulary, grammar and syntax, as it were, in 'slow-motion' on his/her own or in a controlled situation, before applying the theory to practice.*

Please note that this analysis is prone to generalisation and that the resultant picture of the learner will not be clear-cut. Many learners will fall into a compromise category. For instance, the high scorer (31-50) for both categories of items may simply be a really talented linguist who enjoys not only interacting in real or simulated tasks and learning games, but is fascinated by the intricacies of grammar, which he/she has a flair for converting into real language acts. Any initial impression gained from the profile

calculated should simply be the basis for further enquiry through discussion with and observation of the learner. However, the analysis may provide a valuable basis for discussion with the learner about what they feel comfortable with in their learning. It may also alert the teacher to how the learner needs to be monitored and supported to help him/her become a more effective learner. For example, the 'risk-taker' may become stuck at a level, giving an enthusiastic but highly error-prone performance, while the 'safe player' may become very knowledgeable about abstract points of grammar, while being unable to participate in a social dialogue.

**a. The extrovert risk-taker**

Items 1,4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15. 16, 18,19, and 21 relate to activities that tend to appeal to the extrovert risk-taker.

**0 - 10** If the learner's score totals 0 – 10 on these items, he/she may:

- invariably 'play safe' when learning a language,
- always expect vocabulary and grammar and structures to have been formally presented  and explained before they are either introduced receptively or used actively
- always tend towards introverted learning behaviour, e.g. be absorbed by individual study but be averse to taking part in interactive learning activities
- always favour formal, written exercises over informal, oral activities, unless these are highly structured and focused on linguistic points.

**11 - 20** If he/she scores 11 - 20 on these items, he/she may:

- usually 'play safe' when learning a language.
- tend to expect vocabulary and grammar and structures to have been formally presented and explained before they are either introduced receptively or used actively
- usually tend towards introverted learning behaviour, e.g. be absorbed by individual study but need encouragement to take part in interactive learning activities,
- usually favour formal written exercises over informal, oral activities, unless these are to some extent structured and focused on linguistic points.

**21 - 30** If he/she scores 21 - 30 on these items, he/she may:

- Like to feel formally prepared for activities (e.g. some prior vocabulary and grammar input) but not be afraid of making the occasional mistake
- While expecting some prior explanation, be prepared to draw occasional inferences in receptive skills and take informed chances in productive skills
- Be equally at home with private and individual work and interactive learning activities, though may want help from reference sources in the latter. May quite enjoy games as a learning activity, be equally at home with simple communicative written and oral tasks as long as these relate to recently learned linguistic points.

**31 - 40** If he/she scores 31 - 40 on these items, he/she may:

- Be moderately adventurous about performing tasks in which they may draw on prior knowledge that is not always recent. He/she is not normally deterred by the risk of error
- Be able to tackle receptive and productive language tasks without preparation on topics that are fairly familiar
- Tend to favour interactive, communicatively devised tasks and activities over individual and linguistically-focused work, and enjoy games
- Tend to favour communicative written and oral tasks, in which he/she must rely on a wide range of linguistic knowledge acquired over some time.

**41 - 50** If he/she scores 41 - 50 on these items, he/she may:

- Be very adventurous in performing tasks, often with high risk of error. A compulsive risk-taker who is excited by trying out communicative possibilities
- Be willing to take part in all manner of communicative tasks whose linguistic implications and subject matter are not necessarily familiar
- Strongly favour interactive, socially-involving communicative tasks over individual and linguistically-focused work. May respond very well to games, entering into them spiritedly and competitively
- Strongly favour communicative written and oral tasks, in which he/she must rely on a wide range of linguistic knowledge acquired over some time.

**b. The introvert safe-player**
Items 2,3,5,7,9,11,13,14,17,20 relate to activities that tend to appeal to the introvert safe-player.

**0 - 10** If the learner's score totals 0 – 10 on these items, he/she may:

- Invariably take risks rather than check sources when using the language
- Attach no importance to mastering vocabulary and grammar in the learning of a language
- Always tend towards extroverted learning behaviour, e.g. be impatient to get on and conduct a conversation or playa language related game, but be averse to individual textbook learning
- Always favour e.g. informal, oral activities over formal, written exercises

**11 - 20** If he/she scores 11 - 20 on these items, he/she may:

- Usually take risks rather than check sources when using the language
- Attach little importance to mastering vocabulary and grammar in the learning of a language
- Typically tend towards extroverted learning behaviour, e.g. be impatient to get on and conduct a conversation or playa language-related game, but be less inclined to individual textbook learning
- Typically tend to e.g. favour informal, oral activities over formal, written exercises

**21-30** If he/she scores 21-30 on these items, he/she may:

- Only occasionally take risks when using the language, and feel a little insecure when an activity is not supported by reference source
- Have a basic awareness of the value of mastering vocabulary and grammar in the learning of a language
- Have a balanced response to learning types, e.g. while seeing the value of 'social' activities that simulate real situations, wants activity to be supported e.g. based on recent formal learning or closely directed. May quite enjoy games as a learning activity
- Respond similarly to both e.g. informal, oral activities and formal, written exercises

**31 - 40** If he/she scores 31 - 40 on these items, he/she may:

- Very rarely take part in a language task unless fairly sure of most of the language exponents that will be required for its completion
- Be committed to mastering vocabulary and grammar when learning a language
- Tend towards introverted learning behaviour, clearly preferring formal individual rote learning of vocabulary or grammar exercises to the informal task-based application of linguistic knowledge. May not respond particularly to games
- Tend to favour e.g. formal, written exercises over informal, oral activities

**41 - 50** If he/she scores 41 - 50 on these items, he/she may:

- Always insist on researching all language exponents and grammar relevant to a task before being willing to embark on it
- Be utterly absorbed by mastering vocabulary and grammar, often finding this as satisfying in its own right as applying formal knowledge to practical task
- Habitually adopt introverted learning behaviour, clearly preferring formal individual rote learning of vocabulary or grammar exercises to the informal 'social', task-based application of linguistic knowledge. May find games irritating
- Strongly favour e.g. formal, written exercises over informal, oral activities