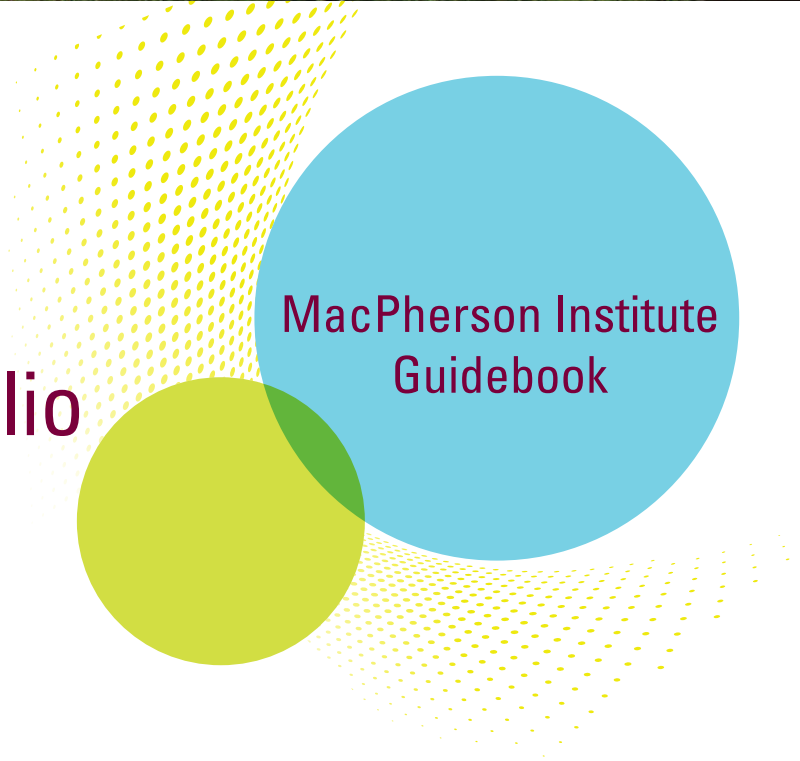




Preparing a Teaching Portfolio

A companion to McMaster's
Supplementary Policy Statement B2:
Teaching Portfolios



MacPherson Institute
Guidebook

BRIGHTER WORLD

McMaster
University 



Summary Graphic: Figure 1	1
Executive Summary	2
Why do I need a Teaching Portfolio?	3
The McMaster Teaching Portfolio	4
Structure & Components of a McMaster Teaching Portfolio	6
Part A: Executive Summary	6
Description of Teaching Responsibilities and Experiences (Part A.i.)	6
Description of Teaching Philosophy (Part A.ii.)	6
Description of Teaching Practice (Part A.iii.)	7
Contributions to Teaching (Part A.iv.)	8
Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness (Part A.v.)	9
Part B: Supporting Documentation	10
Putting it Together	11
Appendices	14
Appendix A: Writing a Teaching Philosophy	14
Appendix B: Formatting and Presentation	17
Appendix C: Including Student Evaluations in Portfolios	18
Appendix D: Practical Considerations & Other Tips	20
Appendix E: How The MacPherson Institute Can Help	21
Appendix F: For Chairs: Helping Your Faculty Get Ready	22
Citations & References	24
Acknowledgements	25

Process in a Nutshell: Putting Together your McMaster Teaching Portfolio

01

Step 1: Consider your context

Reflect on how you contribute to McMaster's culture of teaching excellence and how you are situated in relation to the University's strategic priorities. Review McMaster's Supplementary Policy Statement SPS B2: Teaching Portfolios.

02

Step 2: Collect supporting evidence

Select items that best demonstrate your accomplishments as an instructor, and contact your Chair for contextual data needed for your portfolio's Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness section (Part A.v.), as well as any other departmental evidence or recommendations they may have.

03

Step 3: Construct an argument

1. First, shape the narrative about your teaching by writing your Description of Teaching Philosophy (Part A.ii.) for your portfolio's Executive Summary (Part A)
2. Next, describe what you actually do as an instructor to realize your philosophy in your Description of Teaching Practice (Part A.iii.)
3. Then, continue with the remaining sections of your Executive Summary, from slowest to fastest to develop: Contributions to Teaching (Part A.iv.), Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness (Part A.v.), and Description of Teaching Responsibilities and Experiences (Part A.i.)

As you complete these first three steps, keep track of evidence you might wish to include in your Supporting Documentation (Part B) to support these claims.

4. Finally, organize the evidence you've chosen to include into separate appendices in your Supporting Documentation, and double check that each of these appendices are referenced somewhere in the Executive Summary of your portfolio.

04

Step 4: Review and Revise

Review your portfolio for clarity, internal alignment, persuasiveness, and whether it paints an accurate picture of yourself as an instructor. Consider asking colleagues, your Chair, or the MacPherson Institute to read and provide feedback.

05

Step 5: Update, with Input

Update your Portfolio annually to revise the Executive Summary (Part A) and add or replace evidence (in Part B) with newer, stronger examples. Complete this before your annual review with your Department Chair as it will help you reflect on your accomplishments before meeting, as well as conveniently keep your portfolio up-to-date!

Related Documents

McMaster University Revised Policy And Regulations With Respect To Academic Appointment, Tenure And Promotion, a.k.a. the "yellow document"

SPS B1: Procedures for the Assessment of Teaching

SPS B11: Curriculum Vitae Requirements

SPS B12: Preparation of Dossiers for Tenure/Permanence/CAWAR and/or Promotion



Executive Summary

McMaster University's commitment to creativity, innovation, and excellence in teaching is longstanding and robust, ranging from pioneering problem-based learning to being at the forefront of experiential education, community-engaged learning, and student-centered pedagogy. Behind these achievements is a community of individual instructors and educators who champion innovative teaching practices and collectively enhance the McMaster teaching and learning culture. One way McMaster instructors are able to showcase their personal achievements and unique contributions to teaching and learning is through the teaching portfolio, a required part of McMaster's tenure, permanence, and promotion processes.

This Guide is designed as a companion to McMaster's [Supplementary Policy Statement B2: Teaching Portfolios](#). We begin with an overview of what a teaching portfolio is and why you need to prepare one, and then focus in detail on the structure and components of teaching portfolios at McMaster. Throughout the Guide you'll notice specific tips on preparing your teaching portfolio, as well as comments from McMaster faculty members and administrators on the value and importance of teaching portfolios. Figure 1 summarizes this Guide's content in a quick overview of the required teaching portfolio sections, our recommended process for completing your portfolio, and salient tips. As you begin the work of preparing your teaching portfolio, you may have questions or encounter specific challenges. Please feel welcome to reach out to the staff at the MacPherson Institute for additional support in preparing your teaching portfolio.

What is a Teaching Portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is a record of your teaching values, methods, impacts, and goals. Similar to the use of publications, grants, and academic honours to reflect and substantiate research accomplishments, a teaching portfolio is a curated collection of evidence to demonstrate the best of your teaching (Knapper & Wright, 2001; Kenny et al. 2018).

A teaching portfolio documents your effectiveness as an instructor and mentor by presenting artifacts and self-reflection. Together, these elements establish an evidence-supported narrative about your teaching. As such, a teaching portfolio provides a complete picture of your teaching by allowing you to represent:

1. Your beliefs about students, learning, and teaching;
2. Your teaching methods, responsibilities, and goals;
3. Your contributions to teaching and learning in your field, at McMaster, or beyond; and
4. Evidence of the effectiveness of your teaching.

Why do I need a Teaching Portfolio?

Portfolios can be used for summative or formative purposes ranging from promotion and awards to reflection and continuous improvement. While various scholarly works emphasize the value of utilizing a teaching portfolio as “an excellent tool for developing and improving teaching through a process of documenting goals and achievements and reflecting on teaching activities and accomplishments” (Knapper & Wilcox, 2007, p.2), for the early-to-mid career faculty member, one key purpose of a teaching portfolio is to represent your involvement in teaching to potential reviewers in tenure, permanence, and promotion processes.

We asked members of the McMaster community “why create a teaching portfolio?”, to which they responded:

“A teaching portfolio points your attention to ideas to improve your instruction across time.”
- Dr. Bruce Milliken, Chair of the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour.

“A teaching portfolio is an opportunity for teaching-track candidates to shape their story and provide convincing evidence.”
- Dr. Catherine Anderson, Teaching Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Languages

“It certainly gives more nuance and depth to a person trying to evaluate your appropriateness for a teaching role that a CV doesn’t give. A dossier puts a lot more meat on those bones for contexts where it’s required, like for a job or award. It provides more substance – documenting not simply that you did the teaching, but speaks to what kind of educator you are.”
- Dr. Stacey Ritz, Assistant Dean of the Bachelor of Health Sciences (Honours) Program

“The teaching portfolio is something we all have to do, of course. Yet it can be more than that: it is a chance to reflect on our teaching and to articulate, and perhaps become more intentional about, our goals and practices. It is a way to elevate teaching, both in our individual careers and as a McMaster community.”
- Dr. Christina Sinding, Director of the School of Social Work

Because the teaching portfolio is a requirement of McMaster tenure, permanence, and promotion, this Guide focuses on the McMaster context, though many of the recommendations below are relevant to other contexts including creating or refining a teaching portfolio for job applications or formative purposes. To see more generalized recommendations beyond our institutional context, we recommend the [Canadian Association of University Teachers’ Teaching Dossier](#) guide (CAUT, 2007) and the [Taylor Institute’s Teaching Philosophies and Teaching Dossiers Guide](#) from the University of Calgary (Kenny et al., 2018).

The McMaster Teaching Portfolio

Like many institutions, McMaster has specific requirements for teaching portfolios that are used for tenure, permanence, and promotion. These processes are detailed in their entirety in the policy [McMaster University Revised Policy And Regulations With Respect To Academic Appointment, Tenure And Promotion](#), also referred to colloquially as the “**yellow document**” (as it used to be printed on yellow paper). Teaching portfolios are mentioned therein (see Section III, Parts 5 through 10), with more complete details regarding the requirements of a McMaster teaching portfolio outlined in the Supplementary Policy Statement [SPS B2: Teaching Portfolios](#).

In SPS B2, the *Structure of Teaching Portfolios* section outlines five components that must be included in teaching portfolios that will be submitted to your department as you are preparing for tenure, permanence, or promotion at McMaster. **It is highly recommended that candidates review this policy carefully with their Department Chair, and ensure that their teaching portfolios are tailored to both the policy’s requirements as well as their department’s preferences.**

[Tip] Other Portfolio-related policies

As you prepare for tenure, permanence, or promotion, other McMaster policy statements will be of interest to you. [SPS B11: Curriculum Vitae Requirements](#) outlines the structure of a **McMaster CV**, in which you will provide some basic information about your teaching activities. Given that tenure, permanence, and promotion committees look at both of these documents, keep in mind that your CV should align with and support your portfolio, and furthermore that you do not need to reiterate information in your portfolio that is detailed in your CV! Additionally, [SPS B12: Preparation of Dossiers for Tenure/Permanence/CAWAR and/or Promotion](#) outlines the requirements and expectations for the **entire tenure/permanence or promotion dossier**, of which your teaching portfolio is a part. Finally, the comprehensive methods by which your department is required to **evaluate your teaching** are described in further detail in [SPS B1: Procedures for the Assessment of Teaching](#).

To see a listing of all Academic Assessment and Career Development policies for faculty at McMaster, please visit:

<https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

In the next section, we break down the components of a McMaster teaching portfolio as outlined by [SPS B2](#), and list evidence appropriate for each of these sections in your tenure, permanence, or promotion-ready portfolio. As you pull together the materials for these sections in your portfolio, remember to check with your Department Chair to ensure you’ve met both the departmental and institutional requirements.

[Tip] **What is teaching?**

[McMaster's University Revised Policy And Regulations With Respect To Academic Appointment, Tenure And Promotion](#) (the "yellow document") explains that teaching *"encompasses the selection and arrangement of course topics and materials, lecturing, leading class and seminar discussions, assisting students during office hours, laboratory and studio teaching, marking of student submissions (especially when editorial comments are given to the student), the setting of examinations that permit accurate assessment and continue the learning process, and the supervision of student research at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Teaching-stream faculty are not normally expected to be involved in graduate courses or supervision, although it will sometimes be possible (as, for example, in the MBA Program)"* (Section III Part 7). Keep this range of activities in mind as you map out what to highlight in your teaching portfolio.



Structure & Components of a McMaster Teaching Portfolio

[Tip] Portfolio organization

Though not expressly outlined in SPS B2, create a **title page** as well as a **table of contents**. Then, start each section of your portfolio on a new page. For additional formatting tips, please see *Appendix B: Formatting and Presentation*.

Part A: Executive Summary

The Executive Summary can be considered the core of your McMaster teaching portfolio. It is broken down into five parts, detailed below. Through the Executive Summary, aim to communicate your beliefs about teaching, your methods and approaches, the impact of your teaching practice, and your goals.

Description of Teaching Responsibilities and Experiences (Part A.i.)

SPS B2 description: *description of responsibilities and mechanism of evaluation drawn from the appointment letter, or updates thereto (maximum one page)*


- In this section, simply provide a duplicate of your appointment letter as well as any formal updates made to your appointment letter, if applicable.
- Format: typically, Part A.i is less than one page in length.

Description of Teaching Philosophy (Part A.ii.)

SPS B2 description: *description of teaching approach/philosophy (about one page)*

The teaching philosophy statement is the foundation on which you will build the rest of your portfolio.

- Your philosophy statement should outline your beliefs about teaching and learning in an honest and authentic way. Examples to illustrate your beliefs, presented with some detail, are appropriate for this statement as well.
- The claims made in your teaching philosophy should align with all of your teaching practices and evidence outlined in the rest of your portfolio.
- Craft a statement that is structured and organized – you may wish to seek out other teaching philosophy statements to get a feel for a format that speaks to you.
- Format: written in the first person, approximately one page in length.



[Tip] Philosophy Guidelines

Check out *Appendix A: Writing a Teaching Philosophy* on pages 14-16 for general guidelines on **writing a teaching philosophy**. For more localized guidance, ask your Department Chair or colleagues in your department for samples.

Description of Teaching Practice (Part A.iii.)

SPS B2 description: *description of teaching practice, including examples of how the approach/philosophy has been realized, or how teaching has been adapted to unusual conditions (one to two pages)*

Here, you should describe and provide examples of how your teaching philosophy is realized in your day-to-day teaching practice.

- This section must support your teaching philosophy. Whereas your philosophy primarily focuses on your **beliefs** and contains few examples in little depth, your *Description of Teaching Practice* focuses on what you actually **do** and contains in-depth examples.
- To represent what it is that you do, you might choose to highlight:
 - Your key teaching approaches, along with some explanation of why you teach in those ways;
 - Examples demonstrating how you have adapted your teaching in different situations;
 - A description of your assessment strategies, along with an indication of how these align with your objectives and teaching methods;
 - Explanations of the ways you encourage learning outside of the classroom; and
 - How your teaching and mentoring approaches are linked to McMaster priorities and recommended practices (see section *Putting it Together* on page 11).
- Format: usually about one page, but no more than two pages in length.

[Tip] Alignment is Key

Make sure to **think about how you will align your *Description of Teaching Practice* with your teaching philosophy**. For example, if you indicate in your philosophy that active learning is important to you, then in the *Description of Teaching Practice* you could elaborate accordingly, such as explaining what techniques you use, how you align your active learning approaches with other important aspects of your teaching (ex. learning outcomes), etc. As another example, if you discuss the importance of having an inclusive classroom informed by Universal Design for Learning principles in your philosophy, then in the *Description of Teaching Practice* you could specify how you enact universal design to create an inclusive environment, how you check in to ensure students feel welcome, etc.

Contributions to Teaching (Part A.iv.)

SPS B2 description: *description of contributions to teaching, for example, course design, publications and research on teaching and learning, presentations on teaching and learning, professional development, educational leadership, reports on issues pertaining to teaching and learning (about one page)*

The *Contributions to Teaching* section provides you with the opportunity to highlight your impact on teaching and learning beyond the classroom.

- There are many types of teaching and learning activities that demonstrate your contributions to teaching, including curriculum development and innovations, teaching scholarship, service related to teaching, or educational leadership.
- Describe your curriculum development projects and innovations:
 - Innovative or novel course design
 - Interesting or innovative course materials, assessments, handbooks, study guides, or learning products
 - Participation in design initiatives at the course or program level
- How do you engage in the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning?:
 - Published articles and research you conducted related to teaching and learning
 - Presentations you've given at teaching and learning conferences
 - Grants you've obtained for teaching-related activities and research on teaching and learning
- Consider your service related to teaching:
 - Involvement in curriculum or teaching committees
 - Participation in program reviews (e.g. IQAP)
 - Service as a referee for teaching awards
- What educational leadership have you demonstrated in your department, faculty, or institution?:
 - Service as a teaching mentor for faculty, graduate students, and teaching assistants
 - Facilitation of workshops and events on teaching & learning
 - Coordination of a series, conference, etc. on teaching & learning
 - Demonstration of integration of key McMaster values into your teaching, such as community engagement, student wellness, and supporting international students
- Format: one page summary of your contributions with references to the specific pieces of evidence in *Part B - Supporting Documentation* (i.e. your appendices).

[Tip] **What is and what isn't a 'contribution'**

Contributions to Teaching should not resemble a CV. This section is intended to be a more in-depth, **descriptive summary of your most significant work to shape teaching and learning**. For example, avoid simply listing your courses taught, however, if you have played a key part in a particular course's evolution, describing this project and its impact is entirely appropriate.

In this section, you also want to avoid discussing your growth; instead, **speak to the growth you've fostered in others' teaching and learning**. If you wish to document your engagement in teaching-related professional development in your teaching portfolio, create an Appendix in *Part B - Supporting Documentation* to do so. You're welcome to write a brief invitation to the reader in this *Contributions to Teaching* section, such as "I have also done a lot to develop my teaching abilities, please see Appendix X".

Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness (Part A.v.)

SPS B2 description: *complete details of responses to the summative question in the students' ratings of all courses taught over the past five years. The numerical ratings should be set in the context of all the teaching done in the department and should, at a minimum, include the means (better a histogram) of the scores for the summative question for all departmental courses with possible distinctions (e.g., by level). It is the responsibility of the Department Chair to provide all instructors with contextual data for all the courses given in each term.*

Similar to Section A.i. of your portfolio, the Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness section is a straightforward reproduction of data specific to the summative question - "overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of your instructor?" - in students' end-of-term course evaluations.

- Provide, regarding the last 5 years (if possible):
 - Course title, course code, term, # enrolled students, # responses to course evaluation, mean score, standard deviation, median
 - Department contextual data, such as means of summative question scores for all courses in the department
- Consider how you might want to present your summative question data in relation to contextual data - would comparing data categorized by course level, class size, course delivery format, required vs. elective courses, or with prior iterations of the course be most effective?
- Check in with your Chair to obtain this departmental contextual data and to confirm any preferences for the presentation of the data in this section.
- Do not provide students' comments here – SPS B2 says this!
- You are welcome to address any anomalies in *Part B - Supporting Documentation* (i.e. your appendices), particularly if you have evidence to suggest why your rating significantly changed from one year to another.
- Format: display these statistics in summary tables or histograms

[Tip] How important is this data?

Read *Appendix C: Including Student Evaluations in Portfolios* on pages 18-20 to understand how your course evaluation data will be utilized as part of a **comprehensive evaluation of your teaching**. Indeed, McMaster's [SPS B1 Procedures for the Assessment of Teaching](#) policy requires your Chair to obtain and consider other forms of evidence. This Guide's Appendix C also covers other considerations for what student feedback to include in your *Part B - Supporting Documentation* as well as how best to present it.

Part B: Supporting Documentation

Supporting Documentation is the collection of Appendices to support the core of your portfolio (i.e. *Part A: Executive Summary*). You will strengthen your portfolio if you are able to provide thoughtfully-selected artifacts and evidence that underscore the narrative you have told about your teaching in Part A. Whatever you choose to present in Part B should be referenced somewhere within Part A.

- Appendices to consider including in *Part B: Supporting Documentation*
 - Sample course materials, such as course outlines, assessments, and evaluation frameworks. Ideally, select materials from same course so that alignment in your course design can be seen.
 - Letters of support:
 - Letters can be from your Chair, Dean, or colleagues
 - Letters cannot be from a current student, but can be from a previous student
 - Consider inviting peer review from a colleague if this is not already facilitated within your department
 - Remember: quality over quantity. You likely will not need to include more than three letters.
 - Feedback from educational developers who have observed your teaching – make sure these are done consistent with department policy/norms
 - Student feedback:
 - In addition to the required presentation of responses to the summative question in Part A.v. of your portfolio, you may also choose to collect informal or formative feedback throughout your course in order to refine your teaching throughout the semester, and write a reflection on this work as an Appendix.
 - Student comments can be included, but be careful. At McMaster, anonymous student comments cannot be included in the Executive Summary or the Departmental Evaluation Report of the overall dossier as these are considered unreliable and unverifiable (see page 2 of [SPS B2](#)).
 - Quotes from unsolicited letters and emails from students (with permission)
 - Sample student writing from assignments (with permission)
 - Indicators of student learning, such as samples of work 'before' and 'after' the introduction of a teaching strategy (with permission)

- A concise reflection addressing outlier ratings in end-of-term student evaluations
- Professional development activity completed, such as workshops, courses, certifications, etc.
- Copies of teaching certificates earned
- Teaching awards and nominations by administrators, colleagues, or students
- Scholarly publications related to teaching and learning

[Tip] How much evidence to include?

If you are considering whether to provide more than one sample material (such as a course outline) in your *Supporting Documentation*, ask yourself: what would a second course outline sample demonstrate that the first one does not? Include multiple samples **only if they speak to different facets of your teaching practice**, such as samples from a field course and a lecture-based course, or samples from a 1st year and a 4th year course.

Putting it Together


Where to start?

Now that you are familiar with the types of self-reflection and evidence that you will include in your McMaster teaching portfolio, how might you most efficiently put it all together? We recommend the following step-by-step method for preparing a teaching portfolio, adapted from *Developing a Teaching Dossier* (Knapper & Wilcox, 2007) to the McMaster tenure, permanence, and promotion context.

Step 1. Consider your context

We recommend starting your portfolio process by considering how you contribute to McMaster's long standing culture of teaching excellence, as well as where you situate yourself in relation to some of the University's strategic priorities. For example, you may wish to consult the following resources:

- President Patrick Deane's 2011 [Forward with Integrity](#) letter to the McMaster community, which emphasizes experiential learning, community engagement, and internationalization;
- Following from the *Forward with Integrity* letter, seven [McMaster principles](#) that guide the university community;
- The [Strategic Mandate Agreement](#) between McMaster and the government of Ontario, which identifies areas of institutional strength including Engineering and Sustainability, Health and Society, Human Behaviour, Culture, and Society, and others; and
- The [Okanagan Charter](#), which McMaster signed in 2017 to promote human and societal health and wellbeing.
- [Forward with Flexibility](#), McMaster's resource on promoting accessibility and inclusion in various teaching and learning contexts on campus.



Additionally, revisiting institutional guides may prove helpful to you in identifying your strengths as an educator and shaping goals you have for your future teaching. For example:

- The School of Graduate Studies' [Getting the Supervisory Relationship Off to a Good Start](#) and [Graduate Work Supervision Guidelines for Faculty and Students](#)
- The MacPherson Institute's New Faculty Guide, Effective Teaching in Large Classes: Strategies from Social Sciences Instructors, Supervision & Mentoring of Postgraduate Students, and others. Find all of our guidebooks on the [Resources page of our website](#).

Regardless of whether you are a tenure-track or teaching-track professor, familiarizing yourself with these institutional priorities and recommended practices can help provide important context when preparing your teaching portfolio. Learning about the teaching culture in your Faculty and department can also help you demonstrate familiarity with the specific context in which you teach.

Step 2. Collect supporting evidence


Ideally, you began collecting and updating evidence of your teaching effectiveness when you began teaching. This collection of evidence can include references from students and colleagues, results of student evaluations, mid-semester feedback solicited to improve teaching and learning, records of participation in teaching-related professional development activities, invited peer reviews of your teaching, and more as noted in the sections above. If you have such a comprehensive file, exemplary items that best demonstrate your accomplishments as an instructor can be easily pulled for inclusion in your portfolio. If you are beginning the work of collecting this evidence now, take some time to brainstorm what types of evidence you can gather and then begin to assemble this collection.

Step 3. Construct an argument

A portfolio “is not only a compilation of teaching-related material. It states a case for the approach you take to teaching” (Knapper & Wilcox, 2007, p.5). With that in mind, once you have completed steps one and two, turn your efforts to your *Teaching Philosophy*. Articulating what you believe about teaching and learning and why early on in this process is a key strategy, as this piece becomes the thesis of your portfolio, providing a framework for the presentation of evidence throughout the rest of the portfolio (Schönwetter et al., 2002). Next, describe what you actually do as an instructor to realize your beliefs and how effective your approach has proven in your *Description of Teaching Practice*. Once your philosophy statement and description of practice are well in hand, continue with the next sections of your core portfolio i.e. *Part A: Executive Summary*). Meanwhile, make note of which evidence collected in Step 2 should be included in *Part B: Supporting Documentation* to best support these claims. Together, Parts A and B craft your argument and interpretation of what the evidence in your appendices means about your effectiveness as an educator.

Step 4. Review and Revise

Once you've finished writing, review your portfolio for clarity, internal alignment, and persuasiveness. As you read, consider whether your portfolio presents an accurate and honest portrait of your approach to teaching (Knapper & Wilcox, 2007). You might also consider asking a colleague or an educational developer to read the document and offer feedback. Additionally, review *Appendices D: Practical Considerations & Other Tips* and *E: How The MacPherson Institute*



Can Help on pages 21 through 22 for additional ideas to enhance your portfolio and ongoing development.

Step 5. Update, with Input


A teaching portfolio is a living document that provides its maximum benefit when continually updated to help you reflect your development as an instructor regularly. Consider returning to your portfolio annually, in advance of your annual review with your Department Chair, to make additions and revisions that represent your development over the past year. This will not only inform the conversation with your Chair, but can set the stage for an impactful and comprehensive *Teaching Evaluation Report* - typically written by your Department Chair - that is included in your dossier for tenure, promotion, or permanence processes, as well as letters for teaching award applications. You may also choose to refer your Chair to *Appendix F: For Chairs: Helping Your Faculty Get Ready* on pages 22-24 of this Guide to help them prepare for their responsibilities in this process.

Other methods

Beyond the process recommended here, we asked members of the McMaster community for their insight on the process of creating a McMaster teaching portfolio, having previously done so themselves. They recommended:

- Familiarize yourself with scholarly literature to start your process.
“Do a little bit of reading on some pedagogy so that you can figure out what you might already be doing that fits within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and then make yourself a list of examples of your own work that you can fit into the SPS B2 headings.”
Dr. Krista Howarth, Assistant Professor in the Department of Kinesiology
- Use your regularly-scheduled work to drive your reflections.
“[I] make extensive notes for the courses I teach about how to improve them next time.”
Dr. Daniel Goldreich, Professor in the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour
- Review your previous few years of work.
“For example, look at assignments you created - what does this say about your practices? This can be a low-stakes way to start.”
Dr. Catherine Anderson, Teaching Professor in the Department of Languages and Linguistics
- Collaborate with your Chair, Director, or Dean early to build a strong portfolio.
“I think at one point my Vice Dean gave feedback and asked for revisions, which provided the opportunity for a discussion. There was space for an iterative process.”
Dr. Rebecca Gewurtz, Associate Professor with the School of Rehabilitation Science

Regardless of the methodology you choose, remember that by virtue of being a McMaster University instructor, you help shape a culture of teaching and learning excellence. Good luck and get in touch as you capture your unique contributions in your teaching portfolio!



Appendices

Appendix A: Writing a Teaching Philosophy

Writing a teaching philosophy is an opportunity to communicate your values, beliefs, and approaches to teaching and learning. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate institutional fit with your department, Faculty, and McMaster as a whole. Approximately one page in length, the teaching philosophy is a reflective document that should align with the rest of your portfolio. In other words, the sentiment you express in this document should be evident in the required and supplementary materials you provide.

Beginning Your Teaching Philosophy


Before starting your teaching philosophy, you may wish to consider two overarching questions:

1. Who is the audience for the portfolio? The portfolio is often used to assist a group of people in making a decision. How you write your philosophy should therefore be tailored to what decision is being made. This does not mean being deceptive or dishonest, but rather that your emphasis may shift depending on what kind of message you want to send.
 - For a faculty position – you will want to represent yourself as competent and ‘typical’; if you are applying for a teaching position, however, you may want to show more than competence.
 - For tenure, permanence and promotion – you will want to represent yourself as competent and show the development of your teaching over time.
 - For a teaching award – it is not enough to be competent. You need to represent yourself as unique and expert; you must stand out from the others.
2. If someone were to describe you as a teacher, what would you like them to say? What aspects of your approach do you want to emphasize? In addition to considering your audience, you may wish to consider how you want to represent yourself to your readers beyond ‘competent’ or ‘excellent’. Prior to writing, reflect on your beliefs and attitudes towards teaching and learning.

Ten Questions to Consider when Planning Your Teaching Philosophy

When planning to write your McMaster teaching philosophy, it may be helpful to brainstorm responses to the following questions:

1. What do you believe about students and how students learn?
2. What do you believe to be your primary responsibilities as a teacher? For example, do you prioritize conveying content, encouraging intellectual growth, or preparing students for the workforce?


- 
3. What is a critical incident - positive or negative - that shaped your development as a teacher? For example, is there an event that helped form your opinions about what good teaching looks like?
 4. When are you particularly satisfied with your teaching? Think of a specific occasion and identify why you view it positively.
 5. What do you do, in class or outside of it, to create conditions that optimize student learning and growth? How does this change with different groups and settings (e.g., mentoring graduate students, supervising teaching assistants, teaching undergraduates in a lecture hall, or overseeing fieldwork trips?)
 6. How do you know you are a good teacher? Consider methods of self-assessment.
 7. Do you engage with scholarly literature on teaching and learning? If so, how does this inform your teaching practice?
 8. How do you support the integration of international students, disabled students, and students from other equity-seeking groups?
 9. How do you support student health and wellbeing, as highlighted in the Okanagan Charter?
 10. How do you approach working with a teaching team, including co-instructors or teaching assistants?

By reviewing your answers, you will likely be able to extract several general principles regarding your beliefs about teaching and learning. These can form the foundation of your teaching philosophy.

What Characteristics Should a Teaching Philosophy Include?

Strong teaching philosophies often share a number of key characteristics that effectively communicate one's approach to teaching and learning. In general, an effective teaching philosophy includes the following traits:

- Reference to evidence: Your teaching philosophy is primarily about your beliefs and values as they relate to teaching and learning, but it also primes the reader to interpret evidence of teaching effectiveness elsewhere in the portfolio. You may wish to directly connect a belief or principle to a specific example of application in the philosophy itself, or you may wish to refer the reader to another section of the portfolio that describes it in more detail.
- A developmental focus: While it may be tempting to present yourself in the best possible light, your teaching philosophy can be an opportunity to demonstrate how you continue to learn and improve your teaching practice. Acknowledging past or current challenges and explaining your strategies for addressing them signals your commitment to continual teaching improvement and professional development.
- An authentic and personal tone: Writing a teaching philosophy is an opportunity for you to convey elements of your personality so that readers can gain a sense of who you are and why you hold particular beliefs and values. Using first person language (e.g., “I” and “my”) and



sharing brief stories or anecdotes can differentiate you from others and help contextualize the information in the rest of your portfolio.

- Clear organization and concise language: Like the rest of your portfolio, your teaching philosophy should be presented in a way that reduces the amount of interpretation the reader must do to understand your points. A teaching philosophy should have a clear structure (e.g., each paragraph should address a discrete topic or belief) and should be free of grammatical or syntactic errors. Generally, teaching philosophies should not exceed one page in length. However, if you do go over one page, consider using boldface, boxes, or subtitles to guide the reader who only has time to skim.

What Characteristics Should a Teaching Philosophy Avoid?

- Use of clichés and platitudes: Writing a teaching philosophy can be difficult, and it can be tempting to defer to common expressions or vague language to describe your approach to teaching and learning. While these may be natural starting points, consider refining them to more accurately reflect a thoughtful and accurate description of your approach to teaching. For example, describing yourself as a gardener and your students as plants may convey something about how you view your relationship to your students, but in the absence of more specific contextualization, it may be interpreted as clichéd.
- Excessive references to literature: A teaching philosophy focuses primarily on your beliefs and values, not your mastery of the literature on teaching and learning. Incorporating some references to scholarship is appropriate, but this should not overshadow your account of what you believe and why.
- Negative attitudes towards students: Teaching philosophies that portray students in a negative light (for example, as lazy or entitled) can come across as disrespectful and inappropriate. While teaching can sometimes be challenging, it is important to discuss students respectfully.

Once Your Philosophy is Written

When a draft of your philosophy is completed, ensure that it aligns with the rest of your portfolio. For example, if you explain that active learning techniques are a staple in your teaching but the supporting documentation describes a reliance on traditional lectures and multiple choice tests, a reader may perceive a credibility issue. Make sure that your philosophy and the rest of your portfolio are consistent.



Appendix B: Formatting and Presentation

Once you have developed the content for your teaching portfolio, it is time to put it all into a cohesive document. While this may seem like a straightforward task, it is essential to pay close attention to detail in order to convey professionalism and pride in your teaching. Keep in mind the importance of making the document as straightforward to understand as possible for potential readers; especially if you are applying for a job, remember that readers are likely scanning many portfolios and appreciate being able to find and read information easily.

General Formatting and Presentation Tips

- Remember to include an accurate table of contents so readers can locate exactly the section they are looking for. Contents should correspond to headings for different sections.
- Use a standardized typeface to improve the presentation and to guide the reader to areas that are most important. If you are using a different font for headings, boxes, or other details to highlight particularly important information, make sure you are consistent.
- Avoid falling into the temptation of filling each page with as much information as can fit on it. White space, such as margins and lines between paragraphs, can make the document easier to read.
- Some graphics (e.g. photos or images) are fine to include, but be mindful of how much space they take up and the purpose they serve. Whenever possible, provide contextual information about why you have included the graphics.
- If asked for a hard copy of your portfolio, consider putting it in a binder or getting it spiral-bound.

While this guide focuses on the preparation of a teaching portfolio in a word processor, some faculty have chosen to move their portfolios online. This strategy requires you to think differently about how you will organize and display the contents, and offers additional opportunities for incorporating multimedia and other design features. Dr. Catherine Anderson, a Teaching Professor in the Department of Languages and Linguistics, describes converting her portfolio to an online site because it is consistent with her use of blended learning techniques and allows her to showcase ebooks, videos, and links to published papers. Dr. Daniel Goldreich, Professor in the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour, suggests that including short video clips can allow the intended audience to see what someone's teaching is really like beyond what is related in text.


Appendix C: Including Student Evaluations in Portfolios

Results from student evaluations of teaching constitute one of the most common types of evidence required in a teaching portfolio, and as such are part of the requirements outlined in [SPS B2: Teaching Portfolios](#). The validity and reliability of teaching evaluations are increasingly coming into question (Boring, Ottoboni, and Stark, 2016; Hornstein, 2017), and in alignment with this growing critique, teaching evaluations are but one of various methods by which a faculty member's teaching practice at McMaster are to be evaluated, as outlined in [SPS B1: Procedures for the Assessment of Teaching](#), which states the requirement for “involving more than one evaluator and more than one site or occasion of evaluation” (SPS B1, page 3). You also have control over shaping the representation of your teaching by presenting various forms of evidence within Part B of your portfolio.

What Data Should I Include from My Student Evaluations?

At McMaster, student evaluations of teaching are generated from institutionally-administered summative course evaluations that students are invited to complete at the end of each course. Once students have completed summative teaching evaluations at the end of every term, you will be sent a course evaluation report. This report contains aggregate mean, median, and standard deviation data and, if applicable, full comments for each course section you teach. Below are some key considerations for choosing which data to include in your portfolio.

- Consider the purpose of your portfolio. If you are preparing it for tenure, permanence, or promotion, it is important to adhere to the SPS B2 guidelines. If you are preparing it for the purposes of applying for another job or for tracking your own growth, you may choose to add different amounts or sources of data.
- Refrain from simply including all of your raw course evaluations. Like the rest of the teaching portfolio, the section that includes your teaching evaluations should be carefully curated so that it communicates essential information in a way that is easy to understand. As you go through your course evaluations, consider which questions or points speak to your teaching strengths the most, and consider how you may highlight them for this section.
- McMaster course evaluations include the question “overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of your instructor?” Evaluation committees expect to see this data displayed prominently. Most other universities have a similar question; it is wise to keep track of the responses to these questions to be able to show growth over time.
- If incorporating student comments in Part B of your portfolio, consider including a selection of only those comments which are specific to your teaching practice. While “the professor is awesome!” is nice to read, it does not convey valuable information about your teaching



expertise; in contrast, a comment such as “the professor used a variety of techniques in class that helped me stay engaged” offers precise commentary on how your teaching strategies affected student learning.

Do I Include Negative Student Evaluations?

Even excellent faculty sometimes receive negative student evaluations, whether in the form of specific comments or quantitative scores that are lower than you may like. SPS B2 requires data from all courses taught over the past five years, and so in the context of a McMaster teaching portfolio, these student evaluations may need to be included.

Across interviews with Department Chairs, Directors, and tenure, permanence, and promotion committee members, opinions converged regarding how they utilize student ratings as part of McMaster’s comprehensive evaluation of an instructor through the tenure, permanence, or promotion process. Dr. Daniel Goldreich, Professor in the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour explained that *“you don’t need to be perfect, but need to show a trajectory. We have some faculty here who have some dips - they taught a really difficult course - but just address it honestly and share what you learned from that.”* Indeed, addressing these situations head-on in your portfolio creates an opportunity for you to demonstrate good teaching practice, as pointed out by Dr. Peter Walmsley, Chair of the Department of English and Cultural Studies, *“providing evidence of reflection on feedback should be core to your process.”*

In addition to you having the opportunity to address undesirable ratings in your portfolio, be reassured that members of your review committee will not take lower ratings at face value either.

“We go deep to evaluate why issues might be happening - good professors can get hammered - so it could be the way a course is structured or the content. We’ll also evaluate who are the students coming in, and whether any of these factors could be impacting the situation,” says Dr. Elizabeth Weretilnyk, Professor in the Department of Biology, who has made a long-standing contribution to her departmental tenure & promotion review committee.

How Should I Format My Student Evaluations?


- Quantitative data are best presented in a way that is clear and easy to read. Tables, histograms, graphs, and other tools allow you to visually organize your data in ways that make it easy for the reader to chart your teaching competency and growth over time.
- Make sure that you include headings and labels for tables or histograms, and that you accurately report the questions that were asked and the range of possible answers (e.g., “on a scale of 1-10”). It is also important to show the units in question (e.g., percentages or averages). Whenever possible, provide contextual information such as departmental averages and medians for a given term or for a given course.
- Always specify where the information comes from. Are the data from McMaster’s summative evaluations, evaluations from other institutions, or based off of an evaluation you created yourself? Again, bear in mind the SPS B2 requirements if you are preparing the portfolio for tenure, permanence, or promotion.

- When formatting student comments about your teaching strengths, consider organizing them by theme rather than listing them in no particular order. If you can identify three or four consistent themes that emerge in summative evaluations, you can create a table with those themes as headings and include several comments that speak to your skill in that area.
- Consider the value of including some comments that demonstrate how your teaching has improved over time. For example, if you used to receive comments that the rationale for assignment grades was unclear, and if responded by changing how you communicate assessment expectations, you can highlight this process in a table.

Appendix D: Practical Considerations & Other Tips

In addition to the tips and suggestions outlined above, here are some other ideas for planning, designing, and maintaining your portfolio:

- Always keep the purpose and audience of the portfolio at the top of your mind. Who is reading and why? What are they looking for?
- Remember that the supervision and mentorship of graduate students (including teaching assistants) is a form of teaching. Highlighting your work with graduate students allows you to demonstrate the breadth of your teaching skills.
“Grad students tend to be around for a while and get to see the candidate over time, and their interactions with a professor tend to be at a number of different levels: instructor, mentor, co-author, psychologist, et cetera!”
- Dr. Elizabeth Weretilnyk, Professor in the Department of Biology
- Try to think about teaching expansively, and not as something that occurs only in a lecture hall or classroom.
“Consider that there are different ways of impacting student learning. A lot of our best instructors get involved in student learning outside of the classroom. It’s so valuable for students when instructors do this. Highlight all of these experiences.”
- Dr. Sue McCracken, Associate Dean of Academics at the DeGroote School of Business
- Did something not go as well as you’d hoped with your teaching? It happens to the best of us.
“Demonstrate that you’re aware of and responsive to issues, for example, ‘outcomes of that teaching experience have led me to do the following...’. Demonstrate how you address your weaker points. Demonstrate reflection.”
- Dr. Greg Wohl, Associate Chair of the Undergraduate Department of Mechanical Engineering
- Similarly, the Chairs, Directors, and tenure, permanence, and promotion committee members all agreed that they look for growth in the portfolios they evaluate. Addressing a weaker moment as suggested above is wise; however, if your students ratings are high, find other ways to demonstrate your development.
- Consider scheduling some time to update it on a regular basis, perhaps at the end of every



academic year. It is far easier to regularly update your teaching portfolio than it is to revisit it when it is significantly outdated. Additionally, always remember to check for internal consistency after updating or revising the portfolio.

Appendix E: How The MacPherson Institute Can Help

Feedback Services

As noted above, soliciting and acting upon mid-semester feedback from students is one way that you might document your efforts to improve teaching and learning. We can help you obtain anonymous, useful feedback from your students via a course refinement, or provide you with our suggestions via a course observation.

- A **course refinement** is a way to collect useful, personalized feedback about a course (or courses) you teach. In this low risk, highly popular approach, an educational consultant from the MacPherson Institute will meet with you to discuss what kind of feedback you would like to solicit, collect that data from your students, and share the results with you, highlighting the major themes that emerged and suggestions for growth. Unlike end of term evaluations, this process allows instructors to respond to student feedback while the course is still ongoing. Since their feedback might therefore affect them in an immediate way, students often provide more serious and substantial commentary than is common in summative evaluations.
- A **course observation** is a way to get feedback from a MacPherson Institute educational developer on a particular teaching context. The educational developer will meet with you to determine what kind of feedback would be most useful to you, visit your class for a predetermined period of time, and arrange a meeting with you to discuss areas for improvement in the classroom.

To learn more about course refinements or course/teaching observations, or if you would like information about other methods of collecting student feedback, feel free to contact us at <https://mi.mcmaster.ca/feedback/> or eee@mcmaster.ca.

Course (re)Design Workshop

If you're looking for a crash course in course design or teaching skills, try our 3-day Course (re)Design Workshop (CrDW). The CrDW engages and supports academic staff in the design or redesign of courses of any size to encourage student engagement and student success. It includes facilitated sessions on course design topics, including constructive alignment, learning outcomes and assessment, and also includes dedicated time for individual work, peer feedback, and consultation time. The structure of the workshop encourages instructors to focus on a single course design, while developing skills applicable to course design more generally. To learn more about the CrDW, or to register, please visit the [Educator Enhancement Program Eventbrite page](#) or contact us at eee@mcmaster.ca.



Instructional Skills Workshop

The Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) is an internationally recognized certificate program that offers participants the opportunity to practice their teaching in front of a group of peers and to receive direct, facilitated peer feedback (written, verbal, and video) on the aspects they are interested in improving in a multitude of media. It is offered within a small group setting and presents a structured framework for planning and delivering lessons. Each participant designs and delivers three 10-minute participatory mini-lessons and provides constructive feedback on the lessons of others. Many experienced instructors use this workshop as a place for refining their ideas about education and trying out new approaches for their classes. To learn more about the ISW, or to register, please visit the [Educator Enhancement Program Eventbrite page](#) or contact us at eee@mcmaster.ca.

Individual Consultations

You are welcome to contact the MacPherson Institute to arrange a one-on-one consultation regarding a teaching and learning question, issue, or portfolio review. To reach out, please contact us at <http://teaching.mcmaster.ca/request-support/> or eee@mcmaster.ca.

Appendix F: For Chairs: Helping Your Faculty Get Ready

As a Chair, you are in a unique position to be able to support faculty as they prepare and maintain teaching portfolios. From the outset, it is important to distinguish the purpose and requirements for tenure and teaching stream faculty. Whereas the portfolio does not go beyond the departmental level for the tenure and promotion of tenure stream faculty, it has a wider audience (i.e. external reviewers) and has a much greater weight in the permanence and promotion processes for teaching stream faculty. As such, Part B is far more significant for teaching stream professors, as this section allows them to demonstrate their teaching excellence to a much greater degree.

General Tips for Chairs

- Consider making teaching portfolio review part of your annual reviews with both tenure and teaching stream faculty. This will help both you and the faculty member be well-prepared for their tenure, permanence, and promotion processes.
- Make yourself available to faculty should they have general or specific questions or concerns about the process of completing a portfolio.
- Have contextual data prepared to share with faculty upon request for their presentation of student responses to the summative question in course evaluations in Part A.v. of their teaching portfolio. This data could be categorized in different ways to optimize the contextual comparison: by course level, class size, course delivery format, required vs. elective courses, or with data from prior iterations of the course.

- Encourage faculty to speak with each other about strategies for preparing a portfolio. See if some professors will share some or all of their portfolio with individuals who are just starting the process of assembling it. Alternatively, if several faculty are actively working on portfolios at the same time, consider encouraging opportunities for peer feedback.
- Encourage faculty to attend the annual *Tenure, Promotion, and Permanence at McMaster* workshops for new faculty (which include guidance on teaching portfolios) run by the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty; to consult this guide; or to schedule a consultation at the MacPherson Institute.
- Connect faculty with useful McMaster resources and priority initiatives, as appropriate. For example, if during one of your annual reviews, a faculty member articulates a goal to focus on accessibility in their teaching, share McMaster's [Forward with Flexibility](#) resource or recommend Universal Design for Learning literature.

Reading and Evaluating Portfolios

Faculty may request your feedback on their portfolio as they prepare it for tenure, permanence, or promotion or another purpose. The questions below (from Kenny et al., 2018) can serve as starting points for assessing and providing feedback on a portfolio.

- Is the portfolio strongly grounded in a teaching philosophy statement that clearly summarizes the author's core beliefs about teaching and learning, and the key claims they make about their practice? Does the philosophy statement provide a strong framework for the presentation and organization of the portfolio?
- Is evidence provided from multiple perspectives (e.g., self, instructors, peers) to substantiate claims made throughout the portfolio? Are the sources of evidence appropriate given the context of the author's teaching roles, responsibilities, experiences, and expertise? (Note: the depth of evidence presented in a new academic's portfolio will vary from that of an experienced academic). Can strong alignment be seen between the evidence provided and claims made throughout the portfolio?
- Are links to scholarly literature provided throughout the portfolio where appropriate?
- Is the portfolio grounded by a critically reflective narrative that puts the evidence into context, highlights key learning, and describes how the author's teaching and learning approaches have developed and evolved over time? Does the reflective component make connections between the philosophy statement and evidence, and across sources of evidence? Is the author's voice evident and consistent throughout the portfolio?

- Is the portfolio presented as a clear, succinct, and integrated document? Is the portfolio presented in a way that is appropriate for the intended audience and purpose and given the author's teaching roles, responsibilities, experience and expertise?
- In general, what are the strengths of this portfolio? What specific changes could be made to improve this portfolio?

For an alternative option to the above set of guided questions, the [Teaching Philosophies and Teaching Dossiers Guide](#) (Kenny et al, 2018) also includes a Teaching Dossier Self- Or Peer-Assessment Rubric (pages 32-33), which may better suit your or your faculty member's portfolio review goals.

Citations & References

- Boring, A., Ottoboni, K., & Stark, P. (2016). Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness. *ScienceOpen Research*. doi: [10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AETBZC.v1](https://doi.org/10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AETBZC.v1)
- CAUT. (2007). *Teaching Dossier*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association of University Teachers. Retrieved from <https://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/professional-advice/teaching-dossier.pdf>
- Hornstein, H. (2017). Student evaluations of teaching are an inadequate assessment tool for evaluating faculty performance. *Cogent Education*, 4(1). doi: [10.1080/2331186X.2017.1304016](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1304016)
- Kenny, N., Berenson, C., Jeffs, C., Nowell, L., & Grant, K. (2018). *Teaching Philosophies and Teaching Dossiers Guide*. Calgary, AB: Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/taylorinstitute/resources/>
- Knapper, C. & Wilcox, S. (2007). *Preparing a Teaching Dossier*. Kingston, ON: Queen's University, Centre for Teaching & Learning. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255576822_Preparing_a_Teaching_Dossier
- Knapper, C., & Wright, A. (2001). Using portfolios to document good teaching: Premises, purposes, practices. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 88, 19-29. doi: [10.1002/tl.34](https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.34)
- Schönwetter, D. J., Sokal, L., Friesen, M., & Taylor, K. L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 7(1), 83-97. doi: [10.1080/13601440210156501](https://doi.org/10.1080/13601440210156501)

All Academic Assessment and Career Development policies for faculty at McMaster can be found at: <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the McMaster students, staff, administrators, faculty, and instructors whose time and expertise have shaped and enhanced this Guide: Tiffane Anandarajan, Catherine Anderson, Erin Aspenlieder, Kim Dej, Rebecca Gewurtz, Susan Searls Giroux, Daniel Goldreich, Krista Howarth, Susan McCracken, Bruce Milliken, Biljana Njegovan, Stacey Ritz, Steve Sears, Christina Sinding, Elliot Storm, Catherine Swanson, Rebecca Taylor, Peter Walmsley, Douglas Welch, Elizabeth Weretilnyk, and Greg Wohl.