

Creating an Electronic Portfolio (Website review)

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Site URL

<http://pirate.shu.edu/~devlinrb/indexport.html>

Site Title

Creating an Electronic Portfolio (Author: Roberta Devlin-Scherer)

Intended Audience

While this site is ostensibly aimed at young teachers who are either recently graduated or about to graduate, it has immense value for *any* teacher looking for better ways to present themselves and their achievements in print and/or digitally. For job hunters, a resource of this nature and caliber is absolutely essential, but the resource is *so* versatile that it will also prove useful for any teacher who wants to encounter new ways to enrich their own experience and activities or to improve their resumé.

Site Layout and Objectives

The site presents two broad areas of attention, nicely visualized by parallel vertical columns on the left and right sides of the screen. One area is "Professional Employment" (resumes, work samples, experience, references, etc.) and the other is "Learning and Assessment" (standards, lesson plans, achievements, etc.).

The information on this site includes not only *how* to improve your digital and/or print resumé, but often shows where you can actually get help doing it. Plenty of concrete examples encourage your visualization and stimulate your imagination. A resource of this kind is important because digital media *should* suggest new (and improved) ways to communicate and *should* take advantage of information rich media environments. Moreover, lessons learned from print media can be fruitfully extrapolated into digital media and vice versa with exciting and synergistic results. This site will start you thinking about how all this might work: it is a stimulating beginning rather than a resource that wants you merely to proceed through a checklist of features and processes.

Content

The basic staple of a successful job search is the resumé, and you will find information here that deals with that topic, but there is *so* much more. Take for example, the notion of an "artifact" which is a documented "exhibit" (possibly in CD format) that shows what a teacher knows and can do in an actual classroom setting. Concrete examples are also provided. "Teacher work samples" on the other hand, demonstrate a teacher's thinking process through examples of lesson plans which can also be enhanced with movies, photos, or other digital media.

The idea of developing a specifically-articulated teaching philosophy is core to the evolution of good teaching because it compels us to reflect upon, and thereby make conscious, our insights and knowledge. I was pleased to see that the philosophical and conceptual importance of developing a teaching philosophy was very pragmatically (and politically) linked to its utility in helping teachers find a fit with the particular and often idiosyncratic philosophies that evolve in different school districts.

Even the conventional section on how to ask for recommendations is beautifully done and shows that careful and precise thought are the cornerstones to effective resumé production.

Noteworthy Features

The site's information structuring and its navigation allow the user to be sequential if they wish or to select what ever area they want to focus on, in whatever order they wish. User empowerment over designer expertise is always a good best practice in interface design, and it is beautifully illustrated here.

Even though the site advocates the use of new media as enhancements and support features for the more conventional features of print resúmes, you will find that its utility and effectiveness is not hindered by high bandwidth demands. All files downloaded quickly, at 56K and even at 33.6.

Interface

The "Homepage" hyperlink is only located below the bottom of the screen and consequently can be fully hidden from view unless the user scrolls all the way down the page. Perhaps it could be situated higher up as well. Also, <http://pirate.shu.edu/~devlinrb/portfolio/standards.html> for some reason, seems wider than the other pages, and the spacious borders that make screen reading so easy in other parts of the site seem t disappear here.

I was delighted to see so much attention paid to shorter line lengths. Screen reading can be as much as 45% slower than our ability to read on paper and this site avoids the tediousness and difficulty often associated with long line wraps onscreen. Even and old geezer like me had no trouble with font sizes or type.

Some Reflections

Dr. Devlin-Scherer should be highly commended for creating such a valuable resource that can be accessed in so many different ways for so many different purposes. This "Portfolio Handbook for Students" will improve your printed resumé, your electronic resumé, your actual teaching performance, your ability to reflect thoughtfully on what you do, and most importantly, will teach you how to teach others how to appreciate your accomplishments. And if that's not enough, the wonderfully creative ideas contained here will help anyone who wants to develop a better resumé, even if you are not a teacher.

Although I am not a technophobe, I remain somewhat anxious about integrating multimedia into conventionally analogue resources such as a resumé. As sexy and stimulating as an integrated multimedia resumé can be, there is no substitute for real face-to-face exchange, and it is dangerous to put too much confidence in media rich resources.

In both its content and its design (i.e.: layout and underlying HTML code) this site is (unfortunately) exclusive rather than inclusive in its design. It does not take into account in any conscious or sustained way, those employers, readers, or clients who might be either cognitively or physically disabled. When I ran an accessibility test against the site to determine the extent to which it conformed to the World Wide Web consortium's new WAI (Web access Initiative: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>), I used Bobby (<http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp>). The site failed even the priority one conformance level, which is thought to be the very *minimum* needed to accommodate differences in cognitive and physical ability.

It is essential that we as educators exploit and develop the possibilities of media-enriched resources, but we also need to be mindful that there are many individuals who do not see the world in a multimedia way, nor do they need to. When giants like IBM and Microsoft support accessibility initiatives (<http://www-3.ibm.com/able/>) (<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/default.aspx>) it is a clear signal that "the times, they are a-changin'". Enhancing your resume with video is only useful if your potential employer is sighted.

And so while I warmly and enthusiastically applaud a resource like this one, I also worry that we will forget that effective communication can still happen with plain old vanilla text.