

Your Independent Language Learning Portfolio/Dossier

Hints, suggestions, content, organisation, recommended activities, where to get help

Who is it for?

The portfolio/dossier is for you, not for your tutor. It's helpful to get feedback on it from your tutor, who can give you encouragement and suggest things you may want to try, but the portfolio is yours. Don't think in terms of what is expected or allowed. Think in terms of what is important to you.

What should go in it?

1. Your learning journal

It's like a personal diary over the year, so keep it up to date, add to it regularly and put a date on each entry. It doesn't have to be typed either. You could include:

- a description of yourself as a linguist: strengths, weaknesses, anxieties; plus how you want to be
- a plan of what you need to do to get there

"It's useful in that it makes you think about what you could be doing; it gives you extra ideas and helps you to think about that."

- a record of your learning activities, even things you can't 'prove' and informal activities like chats
- diary entries for conversations you've had, e-mail exchanges, videoconferencing discussions, anything you can't or don't want to store in the portfolio - but remember to note what you've learned from these
- diary entries for completed grammar exercises that can't be printed out - have you finally got to grips with this rule, can you really use it? Is your written work for your language tutor improving?
- notes of feedback from tutors and marks from tests and homework – use them to decide what you need to work on more
- reflections - every month or so, think about how you can improve your language skills even more. How can you become more confident and make fewer mistakes? What could you do differently? From time to time, also ask yourself how, when and where you learn best. Look back at the journal and read what you said about yourself before. How have things changed and why?
- targets for holidays, for next semester, for next year
- reward yourself by recognising how well you're doing in your diary entries

"Looking back through my journal has helped me to know how to do it better next time and to work out what's most useful to me."

For more information and ideas see the Learning Guide link on the UCAE website at ucae.manchester.ac.uk/resources/support-and-advice/ From this webpage you will find links to printable forms and questionnaires that will help you record, plan and reflect on your learning.

2. Examples of your work

So you can see how much/how well you're doing; useful notes to look at later and learn from. Not all learning can be 'proved' – that's why your journal is so important. It's up to you, but you could include:

- samples of homework and tests you are proud of, where you got good marks
- things which are useful for revision, eg: vocab lists and grammar notes
- articles you've read with your notes or a summary, which you can look at again
- summaries/reviews of films you've seen/articles you've read
- print-outs from online exercises
- notes on films and programmes you've watched or listened to
- translations of texts you've chosen yourself
- recordings of conversations

What activities can I do?

Your tutors and course handbooks will provide suggestions, but it's really up to you. Do things you find fun, but remember that spending time on things you can do already won't help you improve. So don't just work on your strengths! Look at the Learning Guide

ucae.manchester.ac.uk/resources/support-and-advice/ and check out the links to the resources available in the Open Learning Centre for Languages and Academic English (OLCLAE). Here are some examples to get you going, but you're bound to come up with more.

Reading

- Search online for things you're interested in; read novels, magazines, newspapers
- Write vocab notes/lists, try the grids from the UCAE website

Listening

- Watch films and write a review or notes (just watching passively won't help your language - you need to do something productive as well)

"It helps my language and it's fun cos I like watching films anyway."

- Watch live TV - make notes or use the grids on the website
- Listen to online radio
- Listen to online music, podcasts or CDs - check what's available in the OLCLAE library; following the words of a song isn't a bad idea!

Speaking

- Find a conversation exchange partner or other native speaker, or practise with friends in your group or in your halls - even if they aren't native speakers

"Whenever I go out somewhere socially I always meet French people. I don't know if it's because they stand out because I'm doing French, or there are a lot of French people in Manchester. So it's quite good, because you stand at the bar and you have a few conversations in French, and you think: 'Yeah, that's really nice'."

- Make notes of the new vocab you've learnt from conversations or just record an entry in your learning journal with your opinion on how you're improving

Writing

- Translations, summaries, resumés, letters, emails - use dictionaries, thesauruses and spell-checkers

Grammar

- Exercises in books or online
- Make notes of vocab, rules and explanations to look back at

Vocab

- Whatever you're doing, make vocab notes. Use index cards, a vocab book, anything that works for you, but learn vocab every day - it's the only way

General IT work

- Check out anything available - for translating, grammar exercises, business language, etc.
- Check out language learning sites online

Where can you get help and advice about your language learning?

- Your tutor
- OLCLAE reception
- The 'Support and advice' section on the UCAE website:
ucae.manchester.ac.uk/resources/support-and-advice/
- Fernandez-Toro, M. & Jones, F R. (2001). *DIY Techniques for Language Learners*, CiLT London. Copies are available in the OLCLAE library, or you may want to buy your own
- Donald, S. G. & Kneale, P.E. (2001). *Study Skills for Language Students: A Practical Guide*, Arnold