

> Contents

	Introduction	>	ix
Chapter 1	The Focused Portfolios™ Process	>	1
Chapter 2	Documenting Favorites, Friends, Family, and Developmental Milestones	>	9
Chapter 3	A Basic Portfolio: Linsey	>	69
Chapter 4	The Documentation Process	>	85
Chapter 5	More on How to Fit Documentation into Your Busy Day	>	127
Chapter 6	Ideas for Experienced Users and a More Complex Portfolio: Sierra	>	141
Chapter 7	Using Observations to Plan Individualized Curriculum	>	171
Chapter 8	Reflecting and Preparing for Family Conferences	>	193
Chapter 9	Effective Conferencing with Families in the First Collection	>	215
Chapter 10	The Second Collection and Conference	>	239
Appendix A	Focused Portfolios™ Forms	>	255
Appendix B	Focused Portfolios™ Forms in Spanish	>	277
Appendix C	Sample Forms Using Criteria from Other Assessment Systems	>	291
Appendix D	Quantifying and Aggregating Data from the Focused Portfolios™ Process	>	295
Appendix E	References	>	299
	Index	>	300

> The Focused Portfolios™ Process

a portfolio is a way to document or keep track of a child's ongoing development. By saving samples of a child's work and writing anecdotes about his interactions, a teacher puts together evidence of a child's learning and accomplishments.

Portfolios are well accepted as a type of "authentic assessment." Authentic assessment means evaluating children's growth through their daily activities, instead of using something that is not part of their regular routine, such as standardized tests. Teachers choose authentic assessment because they believe that everyday experiences most accurately show what children have learned and the progress they have made.

We have found that many teachers are interested in using portfolios but find the process overwhelming and time-consuming. We designed the Focused Portfolios™ process with that concern in mind. It offers teachers of children birth to age five a planned and organized format that is easy to fit into a busy day.

From working with many early childhood teachers, we know that your job is already demanding. You're on your feet long hours. You're attentive to the children on a nonstop basis. Your daily task list is lengthy and time-consuming. The Focused Portfolios™ process will not add overwhelming storage and filing problems. This assessment tool will be woven into your daily routines with children and will help you evaluate, celebrate, and enjoy children's development.

> What Is the Focused Portfolios™ Process?

The Focused Portfolios™ process is a framework for creating early childhood portfolios. It offers structure and guidance for teachers who are ready to plan and implement authentic assessment within developmentally appropriate programs.

A portfolio that is put together using this process is a planned collection of "documentation" about a child. Documentation is evidence of a child's experience and includes photos of the child in action, or work samples that the child produced. To go along with each photo and work sample, the teacher writes an "anecdote"—a note describing what was happening with the child at the time the photo was taken or the work sample was made.

The Focused Portfolios™ process is not a blueprint for compiling a scrapbook or a photo album, nor does it limit the scope of a portfolio to a random collection of artwork and writing samples.

Teachers collect specific pieces of documentation over several months. Two or three times a year they pull together what they have collected and prepare a Reflection and Planning Form, which evaluates the child's accomplishments and progress. This report and the portfolio are then shared with each child's family. Teachers and family members conference to set goals and make plans to support each child's growth both at home and in the early childhood program setting.

Using the Focused Portfolios™ process, teachers collect documentation in four categories: favorites, friends, family, and developmental milestones. These four categories show teachers and family members what children's interests and strengths are. Documenting accepted developmental milestones helps look at children's performance in relation to age-appropriate expectations. The framework is the same for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

There are many excellent charts and checklists of developmental milestones and widely held expectations for young children. The Developmental Milestones Charts in this book are adapted from *Developmentally*

Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (Revised Edition) by Sue Bredekamp and Carol Copple, published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For preschoolers, supplemental milestones are drawn from another source: *The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland* (State Departments of Education for Iowa and Nebraska). This is the same source that the authors of the NAEYC book relied on for preschool information.

There were several reasons for selecting these sources:

- These references set the standard of developmentally appropriate practice for the field of early childhood education.
- The books are readily available and widely used by early childhood programs and are therefore familiar to many practitioners.
- The milestones in these sources apply to the age range birth to age five (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers).
- The number of milestones provided for each age range is not overwhelming.
- The information can apply to both typically developing children as well as those with identified special needs.

If you already are using a different developmental checklist or resource, you can still apply this portfolio process in your program. Or if, after reviewing the milestone information in this book, you wish to select another source of developmental information, the Focused Portfolios™ system can be adapted to address any developmental milestones a program chooses. (See appendix C for examples.)

> How to Collect Documentation

Documentation is made up of four parts:

1. Observing a child or a group of children
2. Writing down what you see and hear: the anecdote
3. Taking a photo or selecting a child's work sample
4. Putting the anecdote and photo or work sample together on the collection forms

Specially designed collection forms for documenting children's favorites, friends, family, and developmental milestones are included in this book. Collection forms for documenting progress toward goals for young children with identified special needs (Individual Family Service Plan [IFSP] and Individual Education Plan [IEP] goals) are also included. Chapters 2 and 4 give you specific information about how to collect work samples and photographs and write anecdotes on these forms. These chapters also have

many examples of completed documentation to guide you. In addition, two sample collections for two different children are included in chapters 3 and 6.

For infants and toddlers, photographs accompanied by teacher-written anecdotes or stand-alone anecdotes will be most common. Infants and toddlers just don't produce much on paper because they're too busy exploring the world around them. It would be inappropriate to expect otherwise or to interfere with what they do naturally. Photos and anecdotes are the best way to capture their learning as it unfolds.

Because preschoolers are able to represent more of their learning and knowledge, paintings, drawings, and writing samples will also be included.

For both age groups, teachers write detailed descriptions of children's activities and direct quotes of their oral language. These "stand-alone anecdotes" are also effective and powerful forms of documentation.

Even though the format for this type of portfolio is the same for all children, the pieces of documentation collected will be different for each child. No two portfolios will look exactly the same. Each will tell a distinctive story and include the unique ways in which children show their accomplishments, interests, and personalities.

The chapters that follow will help you become competent at observing and writing anecdotes, taking good photos, effectively sharing with families, and using the information collected to plan accordingly. We've also included suggestions for addressing progress and making changes in second and subsequent collections.

We have worked with many teachers who are implementing this assessment tool. Throughout the book, we include their stories and suggestions to help you learn the Focused Portfolios™ process. We also recognize that, like children, adults have their own pace of absorbing new ideas and information. Therefore, we have separated out some suggestions as "Ideas for Experienced Users" and invite you to make use of these when you feel ready to go beyond the basics.

> Getting Started

Planning is the key to ensuring that observing and recording become regular parts of your routine. If you are well prepared, then collecting documentation will be smooth and hassle-free. Here are basic steps for gathering the necessary materials and getting started with the Focused Portfolios™ process.

Steps	Recommendations
<p>1. Choose a method for storing photos, anecdotes, and work samples.</p>	<p>Set up a file folder or three-ring binder for each child (for photos and anecdotes), labeled with the child's name. Because preschoolers and older toddlers produce work samples (such as large paintings), you may also want a hanging file, cardboard box, plastic crate, or pizza box for each child in which to store those samples.</p>
<p>2. Determine a classroom location where these files and work samples will be stored.</p>	<p>The children's portfolio file folders should be kept in an out-of-the-way place so that they will be safe and ready to share with family members (e.g., a file or desk drawer, a magazine library case, or a plastic milk crate).</p>
<p>3. Decide on the number of times during the year you will meet with families to share the portfolios.</p>	<p>If the children attend your program for a nine- or ten-month session, collecting two sets of items and meeting twice with families is sufficient to document and discuss progress. If the program runs year-round, then collecting three sets of items provides a more informative, accurate, and continuous picture of each child's progress over the course of a year. <i>(See Sample Calendars in chapter 8.)</i></p>
<p>4. Organize the following tools and materials before beginning the portfolio process: cameras, film, film-processing arrangements, photocopies of collection forms, staplers, audiotapes and recorders, and videotapes and recorders.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a camera in each classroom. Due to the cost of film, we recommend a 35-millimeter camera. Instant cameras are easy and convenient to use, but the cost of film is high. Digital cameras are beginning to drop in price. Some programs are finding them very reasonable as a long-term investment. <i>(For ideas on how to fund film and film processing, see suggestions at the end of this chapter.)</i> 2. Acquire film and have several rolls on hand. A roll of 36 photos per child for the year will provide more than enough shots to document developmental milestones and other events that occur, and will allow for occasional goofs or poor quality. <p><i>Continued on next page</i></p>

Steps	Recommendations
<p><i>Continued from previous page</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Arrange for film processing. Teachers tell us that high-volume photo processors (e.g., Wal-Mart or Sam's Club) offer the lowest prices for photo finishing. We suggest that if family members contribute by buying film, you ask them to arrange for prepaid processing or provide you with film-processing coupons. Before you begin the portfolio process, your program can set up a volume account with the store you plan to use. 4. For each child, make at least one photocopy of each of the collection forms for Friends, Favorites, and Family and file these three forms in each child's folder. <i>(See chapter 2.)</i> 5. For each child, make at least seven photocopies of the Developmental Milestones Collection Form <i>(see chapter 2)</i> and file these seven forms in each child's file folder. Suggestion: Photocopying Developmental Milestones Collection Forms on seven different colors of paper (a different color for each area of development) makes it easier to put your hands on the correct form and adds to the attractiveness of the portfolio. This is optional. 6. Photocopy several copies of the Focused Portfolios™ Photo Form to have ready when you need them <i>(see more in chapter 2)</i>. These can be stored in a file labeled "Photo Forms" in your file cabinet or desk drawer. 7. Acquire a stapler for teacher use. This will be used to staple photos and work samples to the collection forms. 8. Acquire audiotapes, videotapes, and recorders <i>(optional)</i>.
<p>5. Prepare to use developmental milestones.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Become familiar with the Developmental Milestones Charts. <i>(See chapter 2.)</i> 2. Think about recommended ways to document developmental milestones. <i>(See the "Recommended Types of Documentation" tables in chapter 2.)</i>

Steps	Recommendations
6. Plan for observation.	Make the following decisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will you fit it in? • How will you write it down? Throughout the book, many suggestions are given to help you with this planning process.
7. Try things out. All new learning requires a time of exploration and trial and error. It will take you a while to develop your own efficiency and expertise at effective portfolio documentation.	Give yourself permission to make some mistakes, to explore the process, to make adaptations for your program setting, and to learn what makes the most effective documentation.

How to Fund Cameras, Film, and Film Processing

Involve the families. Many programs have found this to be a wonderful opportunity to stimulate parent involvement because the rewards are so satisfying. Families love to see the portfolios. And, for that reason, they typically welcome being included in purchasing and processing rolls of film.

Sharon Mann, teacher/director at Westminster Infant Care Center in Peoria, Illinois, felt she could ask her teenage moms and dads to contribute \$10 a year toward film and developing. These young parents recognized the worth of this investment and the value of the information they were receiving from the portfolios.

Many teachers and child care providers ask family members to contribute one roll of film and one film-processing coupon upon enrollment and then subsequently per year. That adds up to twenty-four to thirty-six photos of each child for the year. Families can give film and film-processing coupons to teachers as holiday gifts. The use of digital photography and instant cameras are options to be considered. Because of the cost of digital cameras, printers, photo paper, and film for instant cameras, each program will have to make decisions based on available financial resources.